

Conceptualising disability in the workplace:  
contextualising the responses of managers and  
employees

by

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## Abstract

This research explores how staff and managers conceptualise disabled people within the work setting. Despite anti-discriminatory legislation and government support schemes disabled people remain disadvantaged in terms of employment. The development of the social model of disability has challenged traditional concepts of disability. At the same time the disability movement has sought equality, including within employment. A key factor in the employment disadvantage of disabled people is held to be the discriminatory attitudes of employers and staff.

This research presents a case study of managers and staff within a commercial organisation. To support the data analysis an analytical framework has been developed, utilising existing literature and grounded in Critical Systems Heuristics. The framework identifies different rationalities staff could hold in conceptualising disability within the workplace.

A qualitative approach is used, generating rich data around the concepts the study group hold about disability and disabled people in the workplace. The analysis highlights that people hold ambivalent attitudes to disabled people within the workplace. Whilst generally sympathetic to the idea of greater numbers of disabled people in the workplace, they hold specific ideas that act as barriers to achieving this. These include conceptualising disabled people as less capable, anxieties over the impact on co-workers, and viewing work as generally fixed. This thinking is underpinned by how many people conceptualise work as competitive at an organisational and individual level and their perceptions of fairness, requiring disabled people to fit into work and not be treated radically differently to other workers. Rationality over disability and work is conflicted, with general sympathies over disability conflicting with anxieties over the actuality of disabled people in the workplace. It is argued that individuals rationalise this conflicted thinking by conceptualising disabled workers differently to disabled people. This is seen as significant in determining what is held as reasonable when accommodating disabled people, so becoming a driver of the overall approach to disability within the organisation.

The research offers an original contribution to knowledge in terms of offering new insights about disability and employment. The research offers a new analytical framework based on rationality and a potential contribution to policy on disability and employment.

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## Chapter one - Introduction

*I am a resident. You reside*

*I am admitted. You move in*

*I am aggressive. You are assertive*

*I have behaviour problems. You are rude*

*I am non-compliant. You don't like being told what to do.*

*When I ask you out for dinner, it is an outing. When you ask someone out, it is a date.*

(Extract from 'You and Me' by Elaine Popovich)

This research is concerned with the conceptualisation of disabled people<sup>1</sup> within the work setting, specifically within the commercial sector. As will be outlined below disabled people suffer significant disadvantage in the labour market, both in terms of their chances of obtaining employment, and their potential to advance in work. The significance of this for disabled people is substantial, not only in terms of the economic impact on them as individuals, but also because exclusion from the workplace is seen as underpinning how disabled people are then regarded and treated by society (Oliver, 1999).

The aim of this research is to explore how managers and staff conceptualise disability within a commercial setting. It will consider the way people think about disability and disabled people in general, and how that can then impact on how they think disabled people should be treated in the workplace. It will be argued that the concepts people hold about disability, and about work, are significant to the expectations they hold of disabled workers and how they should be treated in work. Critically what will be considered are the conflicting ideas that people hold, and how they attempt to rationalise them. Given the centrality of work to people within the UK, and the disadvantage that disabled people experience in all aspects of life, including

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<sup>1</sup> Within the UK the preferred terminology is usually to refer to 'disabled people', whereas the term 'people with disabilities' can be used elsewhere (Albrecht et al, 2001). There is considerable literature on the use and development of terminology around disability: throughout this work the term disabled people will be used. However, the term disability is not universally welcomed. It has been noted that it was not a term created by those to whom it is applied, coming from an era when society saw minimal value in what people with impairments had to offer (Harpur, 2012)



employment, the impact of how people conceptualise disability and work is of importance. This thesis will seek to bring some insights into this area.

There are four specific objectives to the research. The first is to develop an analytical framework based on the available concepts and evidence around disability and employment, which will be used to analyse data from the research. The second is to undertake a specific case study within a large commercial firm. This will provide rich data on the ideas and concepts managers and workers hold about disability and disabled workers within the workplace, which can be analysed to meet the aim of the research. The third objective is to utilise the analytical framework in the data analysis to gain specific insights into the data, as well as evaluating its usefulness as a framework. The last objective is to use the findings from the analysis to develop ideas that could be useful in the further development of policy and practice.

Central to the research is how people conceptualise disability and disabled people. Taking a concept as a mental representation that supports people to understand and respond to something (Murphy, 2002), disability as a concept is something that people recognise on a day-to-day basis, although the basis of disability is contested as will be discussed later. People define themselves or other people as 'disabled' (Basnett, 2001; Goodley, 2004), and accordingly as 'non-disabled', and the definition of disability is now enshrined in law, most recently within the Equality Act 2010. Under this legislation, to be defined as disabled is to have a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on the individual's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities (Equality Act, 2010). However, it has been argued that disability can be perceived as fluctuating, making it more challenging to conceptualise and less readily accepted by others (Boyd, 2012).

Whilst the above definition is not specific to employment, the position of disabled people within the labour market is one of significant disadvantage. Government statistics report that whilst the situation has improved in recent years, there remains a considerable gap between the employment rate of disabled and non-disabled people, in that 46.3 % of disabled people are reported as being in work in 2012 compared to a figure of 76.2 % for non-disabled people (Office for Disability Issues, 2013). These figures also indicate that there are significant variations in employment rates related

to types of impairment, with people with learning disabilities or mental illnesses experiencing the lowest employment rates. The data on employment status further shows that disabled people are less likely to be employed within the private sector compared to the public sector (Woodhams and Corby, 2007). Additionally the pattern of employment indicates further disadvantage, with the earning rates of disabled people generally being significantly less than that of non-disabled people, whilst disabled people are more likely to be in semi-skilled and unskilled roles (Barnes and Mercer, 2005). Disabled people themselves report experiencing higher levels of open and covert discrimination within work compared to non-disabled people, along with poorer job-satisfaction (Synder et al, 2010).

The underrepresentation of disabled people in work is an issue that needs to be addressed (Department of Work and Pensions, 2013). Work is seen as both a significant aspiration and a source of major benefits in terms of material, financial and general well-being (Beyer, 1999) as well as promoting good mental health (Kirsh, 2000). Such benefits would seem no different to what could be claimed for working age adults in general, but as outlined above disabled people are significantly less likely to be employed or to advance to higher paid roles when in work. This is despite there being no significant difference in the desire to work between disabled and non-disabled people (Ali et al, 2011), even though some disabled people face additional challenges such as associated ill-health (Easterlow and Smith, 2003). The root cause of this phenomenon is held to be discrimination against disabled people, and is one of significant policy concern for the Government (Harris et al, 2012).

Discrimination is fundamentally a process of judging people (Noon, 2004), and how disabled people are judged is linked to how disability is conceptualised (Gill, 2001). The old adage 'does he take sugar' is well-founded in that disabled people find that non-disabled people prefer to treat them as stereotypes rather than accept them in the identities they develop for themselves (Gill, 2001). As will be discussed later, disability as a concept has undergone a radical reconceptualisation in recent decades with the traditional medical-based concept of disability being challenged by the development of the social model of disability, which identifies disability as rooted in the way society is organised. Alongside this there has been the growth of the disability movement which has demanded rights for disabled people, including in the field of employment. Whilst

there have been significant legal safeguards brought in, the process of employment is still fundamentally one based on the discrimination of employers as to who they wish to employ. It is the task of managers to choose the person most suitable for a role (Boddy, 2011) and for the organisation (Marchington and Wilkinson, 2008), and to direct and influence the behaviours of staff within the workplace (Hannagan, 1995). It is therefore of interest how managers and staff conceptualise disability and disabled workers, and the likely impact this could have on opportunity for and sustainability of employment for disabled people. Whilst the disadvantage disabled people experience in terms of employment is not assumed to be based on the single issue of how managers conceptualise disability, a cornerstone of the social model of disability is that attitudinal barriers are a key factor in the disadvantage and oppression faced by disabled people. In terms of employment disadvantage the disabling attitudes of employers are seen as a major barrier to disabled people obtaining and maintaining employment (Mercer and Barnes, 2004). But this issue throws up fundamental questions that are of relevance, such as to what degree should the rights of disabled people be pre-eminent over the rights of other people, to what degree are other members in society united in their intent to deal with the disadvantages experienced by disabled people, and on what basis should resources be allocated to ensure that disabled people receive whatever rights they have been specifically allocated (Pinder, 1995).

As will be explored in the literature review, there is a range of research into the attitudes of employers to disabled people, the experience of disabled people in employment and the attitudes of coworkers to disabled staff. Whilst such research provides insight into the way people respond to disabled people, it does not address in detail the way in which they think about disability, and how this links to how they conceptualise disabled workers. The aim of this research is to address this gap, specifically by seeking to gain insight into how managers and co-workers conceptualise disability within a commercial workplace. Understanding more fully how managers and staff conceptualise disability and disabled workers opens up the possibility of informing future approaches to bringing greater workplace equality for disabled people, an aspiration that as yet is unrealised despite the introduction of anti-discriminatory legislation and government support schemes. That concerted effort

over a significant period of time has failed to correct the major disadvantage that disabled people suffer in the labour market is indicative of the need to understand more deeply the mechanisms at work that lead to the exclusion of many disabled people from the workplace.

In order to analyse the impact of the concepts that people hold around disability and employment, an analytical framework will be required. The medical model offers a simplistic explanation of the exclusion of disabled people from the workplace, but is widely held to be inadequate, and does not offer any solutions to the challenges of disability and employment. The social model has developed greater traction over recent times, but, as will be argued, does not provide an effective analysis of disability and employment in a capitalist economy. As such a specific framework will be developed that seeks to address disability and employment at a conceptual level. Grounded in the work of Ulrich (1994) on Critical Systems Heuristics, the framework is intended to offer an approach to understanding the often conflicting conceptualisations people hold when they seek to rationalise their approach to disability and employment. It is intended that this approach will offer insights not necessarily offered by more established approaches. The framework will be used to support the analysis of the rich data from the case study, which will use a qualitative approach in order to gain a detailed analysis of how people generally conceptualise disability. This in turn will support the development of ideas around improvements to policy and practice in the area of disability and employment.

Having introduced the aims and objectives of this thesis, the next chapter reviews the literature around disability and employment, examining how the traditional model of disability has been radically changed with the advent of the social model of disability. It covers the development of legislation and policy around disability and employment, before reviewing experiences of disabled workers, and then examining the approach of employers to disability within the workplace. Chapter three outlines the development of an analytical framework, based initially on Critical Systems Heuristics and the work of Ulrich, and then using evidence from the literature review to create a specific framework for the analysis of data taken from this research. Chapter four outlines the case study and the methodology used, which consisted of a series of semi-structured interviews of a vertical slice sample of managers and staff within a commercial

organisation, which in this case was a large bakery firm. Chapter five provides the analysis of the research data, looking at the data in three different ways. Firstly there is a thematic analysis, identifying the key themes that emerge from the data. The next analysis involves examining the assumptions held by people, whilst the final analysis uses the conceptual framework developed in chapter three, bringing together the findings from the first two analyses. This chapter also explores two key drivers to people's thinking, that of the competitive nature of work, and the concept of fairness in the workplace. It goes on to consider the different conceptions people hold about disabled people and disabled workers, before discussing options for improving the approach to disabled people and employment. This then leads into the final chapter, which considers how the research had met the original aims and objectives. It then considers the original contribution to knowledge, the limitations of the research, and further areas for future research.

# Chapter two- Literature review into the conceptualisation of disability and how this impacts on the approach of managers and staff to disabled workers

## **Introduction**

This review will consider first how disability is generally conceptualised within the United Kingdom, looking in detail at the development of the social model of disability and the claims of disabled people around employment. Whilst some evidence will be drawn from sources outside of the UK (in particular work from the US) the focus will be the development and thinking within the UK, specifically around UK employment and disability policy. It will outline how the development of the social model challenged the traditional medical model of disability and became influential in the development of thinking around disability at policy level. The review will consider the legislative response from the Government, primarily in terms of the introduction of equality legislation around disability. This will be contrasted with the Government approach to employment policy, which has been driven by a neo-liberalist ideology which underpinned the workfare agenda at the heart of recent employment policy, and can be seen to conflict with the rights based approach around disability. The review will then look specifically at the Government approach to disability and employment, firstly in terms of the New Deal strategy of the New Labour administration, and then the current approach of the Coalition government.

Having considered how disability is generally conceptualised and how this has influenced Government policy towards disability and employment, the review will consider the evidence around the experiences and perceptions of disabled people in regard to employment, and how those experiences may reflect the conflicted conceptualisations of employers, managers and co-workers. It will then consider how disability is conceptualised by employers, with specific emphasis on the private sector. Starting with the general approach of business to disability, it will review the strategic approaches developed, firstly those based on equal opportunity principles, and then the more recent emphasis on diversity within the workforce, including the business

case made for employing disabled workers as championed by the Disability Business Forum (formerly the Employers Forum on Disability).

Having examined the strategic approaches to disability within business, the review will then look at the evidence around actual employer responses and perceptions around disability, examining these around key themes such as productivity, sickness management, accommodations for disabled people, management and co-worker attitudes, and recruitment and selection. This section will consider the contrast between the positive and pro-disability strategic messages put out by employers, and the far less positive perceptions and practices of employers and managers in regard to employing and managing disabled people. It will highlight an ambivalence at the heart of how disabled people are conceptualised, as organisations and managers seek to accommodate both their general desire to incorporate disabled people into the workforce (a desire driven by their sense of moral responsibility for people they perceive as unfortunate and deserving of support), and their anxieties over the practical implications of taking into the workplace people they see as inherently less able and productive. The last section of the review will draw conclusions from the range of evidence considered, including discussion of the conflicting ideas and motivations of the key players around disability and employment.

## **Conceptualising disability: the development of the social model of disability**

This section will deal first with the traditional conceptualisation of disability, that of the medical model which sees disability as an individual attribute that is to be either cured or ameliorated. It will then outline how the development of the social model of disability challenged this orthodoxy, and offered instead a radical reassessment of disability as being rooted in the disabling barriers faced by people with impairments, barriers that are endemic to a society which has systematically excluded disabled people. It will examine the impact of the social model, including the demands for work to be reformulated to make it accessible to disabled people. It includes consideration of some of the criticisms of the social model, including potential weaknesses within the

social model approach to employment. It concludes with acknowledging that whilst both models recognise the negative experiences of disabled people, they conflict on the cause of such experience. This is of significance, as it is central not only to how disability is conceptualised, but also how support for disabled people within employment is justified. This is the start of a key theme that will be developed in the course of the review, that of conflicting thinking over the nature and cause of disability, leading in the field of employment to ambivalence over incorporating disabled people into the workplace, despite the positive rhetoric from all stakeholders.

Disability has traditionally been seen as an impairment of an individual's physical or mental attributes (French and Swain, 2012). It is the individual who is disabled, unable to look after themselves (Goss et al, 2000), a victim of their personal tragedy (Fougeyrollas and Beaureyard, 2001) and in need of support and compassion for their unfortunate condition (Barnes and Mercer, 2003; Barton 1996). In order to diminish such personal and familial tragedy the disabled person's role is to seek to be as normal and independent as possible (French and Swain, 2008). Disability is seen as the concern of the medical profession, which categorises disability and where possible seeks to cure or ameliorate the individual's condition (Harrison, 1993; Quinn, 1998; Harpur, 2012). Likewise various other professions have developed expertise in understanding and treating the range of conditions recognised as disabilities (Davis, 2004; Finkelstein, 2004). Under this medical model of disability, which separates out the disabled from the able-bodied (Barnes, 2010), the basic premise is that foundation of disability is the biological reality of impairment within the individual body (Williams, 2001). The perception of disabled people is of them as in some way inferior, a viewpoint reflected in the following explanation:

'While the particular type or degree of impairment which disables a person for full participation in society may change, it is inevitable that there will always be a line, somewhat indefinite but none the less real, between the able-bodied majority and a disabled minority whose interests are given less salience in the activities of society as a whole. Similarly the values which underpin society must be those which support the interests and activities of the majority, hence the emphasis on vigorous independence and competitive achievement, particularly in the occupational sphere, with the unfortunate spin-off that it encourages a stigmatising and negative view of the disabilities which handicap individuals in these valued aspects of life. Because of the centrality of such values in the formation of citizens of the type needed to sustain the social arrangements desired by the able-bodied



majority, they will continue to be fostered by family upbringing, education and public esteem. By contrast, disablement which handicaps an individual in these areas will continue to be negatively valued, thus tending towards the imputation of general inferiority to the disabled individual, or stigmatisation.' (Topliss, 1982:111)

Topliss is clear that the majority values are based on 'vigorous independence and competitive achievement', although she also seems uncomfortable with the logical outcome of this, designating the spin-off as 'unfortunate'. In this she reflects the inherent fatalism that seems to run through the medical model perceptions of disability.

The dominant orthodoxy of the medical model has been challenged in recent decades by the development of the social model of disability (Barnes et al, 1999), which conceptualises disability as being rooted in the way society is constructed rather than within the individual. Developed from a combination of academic theorising, feedback from rehabilitative practice and the disabled people's movement (Bickenbach, 2012), the social model argues that disabled people are oppressed and excluded from society (Hayes and Hannold, 2007; Barnes and Mercer, 2003; Barton, 1996), tracing the root of this exclusion to the industrialisation of society (Priestley, 2003). It has been argued that prior to this era no-one was perceived as unproductive (Barnes and Mercer, 2003) with disabled people liable to be included rather than excluded (Barnes and Mercer, 2005). The development of capitalism required standard bodies (Davis, 1996) able to adhere to the working regimes required of industrial machinery (Oliver, 1990), so as to maximise the productivity and efficiency (Borsay, 2005) required to deliver the profitability that the capitalist market system required (MacEwan, 1999). Disabled people, seen as less productive (Barnes and Mercer, 2005), were excluded from workplaces (Oliver, 1990; Abberley, 1997; Sapey, 2004) that gave scant regard to the needs of disabled people (Hahn, 1997). Social model theorists argue that as part of this process of exclusion, defining and managing disability became the preserve of a paternalistic medical profession (Thomas, 2007), reinforcing the personal tragedy concept of disability (Barnes and Mercer, 2003). Under their oversight disabled people were segregated from the workers (Oliver, 1990), seen to be in need of care and support and perceived as a burden to the state and tax-paying majority (Oliver, 1999). Indeed there were those who under the banner of social reform wanted to prevent disabled people from marrying and having children (Braddock and Parish, 2001).

Industrialisation did not specifically target disabled people, but swept away what was there before (Abberley, 1999), and in the drive to employ the cheapest labour (Grover and Piggott, 2005) disabled people were excluded from the workforce (Oliver, 1999).

The social model rejects the medical model as the basis for analysing disability (Williams, 2001). It re-conceptualises disability not as a consequence of an individual's impairment, but rather as the impact of the barriers inherent within a society that is constructed around an able-bodied norm (Harpur, 2012), which in the work setting is around the norm of an ideal worker (Foster and Wass, 2013). It is these attitudinal and physical barriers, alongside 'hostile physical and social environments' (Barnes and Mercer, 2003:126), that are held to disable people, not their impairments. Accordingly, the radical social model seeks to break the link between impairment and disability (Barnes and Mercer, 2003), although this has been criticised on various grounds, including for neglecting impairment (French and Swain, 2012) and failing to appreciate the lived experience of disabled people (Bickenback, 2012). Whilst there has been a vigorous debate of the relative importance of impairments as part of disability, the key common element to the various iterations of the social model has been the recognition that there are barriers within society that impact negatively on people with impairment, thus creating disability (Thomas, 2007).

Disability is, therefore, seen as a result of something that is wrong with society that needs resolving (Pinder, 1996; Schriener, 2001), rather than it being the individual who is in need of being fixed (Rioux and Valentine, 2006). The social model seeks to recast disabled people not as tragic victims defined by their impairments (French and Swain, 2008), but rather as victims of an oppressive society that has failed to take into account their needs as people with impairments (French and Swain, 2012). Society should instead seek to include all of its members, with all their differing impairments, as a matter of obligation (Asch, 2001). The social model rejects the notion that disabled people should naturally be seen as recipients of welfare or charity, but rather should be supported to be productive and employed members of society, and thus the workplace should therefore be made accessible for disabled people (Roulstone, 2004).

Disability theorists also argue that central to the oppression of disabled people is how they are perceived by non-disabled people, the 'Kierkegaardian dread' (Hughes, 2007:680) that people feel towards the impaired Other, changing behaviour within

both themselves and disabled person. There is evidence that non-disabled people are prone to be judgmental, their attitudes dependent on the characteristics of someone's disability (Miller and Werner, 2005), reacting less sympathetically to disabilities that are seen to be in some way the fault of the person concerned (Florey and Harrison, 2000). It is argued that disabled people are seen as objects of dread and horror (Shakespeare, 1997), eliciting irrational fears within non-disabled people (French and Swain, 2008). They remind non-disabled people of the potential for them to suffer such indignities, and so are rejected as repugnant (Barnes and Mercer, 2003). This chimes with the reflections from disabled people that non-disabled people react to them as if they carry some form of contagion (Murphy et al, 1988), whilst the responses of others can push some disabled people into denial over their disability in order to avoid being judged as difficult and self-centred (French, 1993). As has been rather poignantly observed, whilst white people have been known to mimic attributes of black people in a desire to associate themselves with their culture, this has never been the case with non-disabled people: the only elements of disability that non-disabled people seem to seek to appropriate are their parking spaces (Hughes, 2007).

The impact of the social model has been significant (Goodley, 2011), as has the social movement around disability rights (Barnes et al, 1999). Disabled people and their allies have expressed forcefully their demands for rights in order that they could pursue their goal of independent living alongside the rest of society (Thomas, 2007; Barnes and Mercer, 2003; Campbell, 1997). Central to this is the demand for support: disabled people have identified that due to their impairments they would need specific support (Rioux and Valentine, 2006). However, the social model approach to support is to reject the notion that disabled people are in need of care (Thomas, 2007), instead demanding civil rights to support in order to live independently (Davis, 1997; Goodley, 2011). In doing so the traditional notions of care and support through the welfare state are challenged, the argument being that welfare resources should be used to facilitate disabled people to be able to fully participate in all aspects of society (Davis, 1996). Welfare can be seen as an approach that compensates disabled people for the effects of the oppression they experience: the charge is that such an approach fails to deal with the root cause of the oppression they experience (Gleeson, 1997). Indeed the welfare state is seen as supporting the oppression of disabled people as it hands

control of support to the professionals, placing them in a position of power and control over disabled people and their lives (Oliver, 1993; French and Swain, 2012). The demand for support is very much about demanding a change in control of the support available, in that disabled people identify that they as individuals are the best arbiters of what support they need and how it should be used (French and Swain, 2012; Oliver, 2009).

Given the centrality of employment to the social model (Barnes, 2000) it follows that the demand is also for access to employment (Abberley, 1996) and the consequent economic gains that would provide independence and social inclusion for disabled people (Priestley, 2003). This was an issue from the start of the disability movement's demands for inclusion:

'...when formulating the 'Fundamental Principles of Disability' (1976), the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS) stated that: 'In the final analysis the particular form of poverty principally associated with physical impairment is caused by our *exclusion from the ability to earn a living on a par with our able bodied peers due to the way employment is organised*. This exclusion is linked with our exclusion from participation in the social activities and provisions that make general employment possible. (UPIAS, 1976: 14; emphasis added)' (Barnes, 2000: 442)

Critical to this is the demand that work must be accessible to disabled people. In line with the social model analysis of society the problem becomes not that disabled people are impaired, but that work, like society, is designed without taking account of disabled people's needs. This leads to the idea that the onus is on workplaces to become accessible and supportive. From the perspective of the social model, once disability is re-conceptualised it is necessary to then re-conceptualise employment and the workplace (Barnes and Mercer, 2005).

Given that the social model places the origins of disability in the industrialisation of work and subsequent exclusion from the workplace, so it follows that what is required is profound socio-economic change (Vanhala, 2006), including a radical reformulation of work (Barnes, 1999; Oliver, 2009) in which the current driving forces of competition, productivity and profit must be replaced by more humane, non-competitive system (Finkelstein, 2001). Failing this it needs to be accepted that the problem lies in the disabling attitudes of employers, the failure to provide accessible workplaces and the lack of support to disabled people in work (Smith, 1996). However, it is not simply the

case that the solution is opening up workplaces to disabled people: it would also include acknowledging that expecting some disabled people to be as productive as non-disabled people, or to work the same hours and routines, is unreasonable (Oliver, 2009). Regardless of what changes are made to promote accessibility within work, there would still be some disabled people whose impairments would mean they would not be as productive as other people (Abberley, 1999; Shakespeare, 2006). Any definition of what it is (or is not) reasonable to expect from disabled people is not necessarily fixed. Who is accepted as exempt from the requirement to work, due to their status as a disabled person, depends on the state of the economy, and how much return could then be made from an individual's work, rather than a rigid definition of their actual impairment (Priestley, 2003).

The demands for wholesale changes to the nature of work reflect other issues, the first being the Marxist origins of the social model (Harpur, 2012) that roots the problems faced by disabled people in the nature of capitalism. Excluded from employment as capitalist industrialisation progressed, disabled people had no choice but to rely on others to meet their material needs (Thomas, 2007). This issue will be considered in further detail elsewhere, particularly when considering the impact of neo-liberalist ideology on the approach to disabled people and employment. The second issue is the paradox that can be seen to lie within the model, that of the dilemma of difference. The conundrum of the dilemma of difference was identified firstly by Goffman (1963), and then by others (Bickenbach et al, 1999). In essence the dilemma involves two conflicting ideas. The first is that if discrimination against a certain group of people is to be rectified, then that group of people will have to be identified, and such identification will of necessity require their inherent differences to be highlighted (how otherwise could they be identified). The second is that if in pursuing equality the differences between people are to be set aside, then the differing needs of people can then be ignored as everyone is being seen as the same. This has some significance for disabled people and employment, and will be considered as part of the conclusions of the literature review.

It is widely accepted that the social model of disability has had a profound impact on the approach to disability in the UK and elsewhere (Bickenbach, 2012), and, as will be discussed later, it has been seen as instrumental in the development of the legal rights

around disability, and the approach to social and employment policy. Whilst the social model has been the main focus of disability theorising within the UK (Williams, 2001), elsewhere there have been other approaches to conceptualising disability. Within the USA the approach, whilst broadly similar to that of the UK, has been more focused on a minority group model (Priestley, 2008) where disabled people are seen as devalued and marginalised within society. There has also been the Nordic relationship model, which is focused on positive welfare services and normalisation principles in order to encourage participation of disabled people within society (Goodley, 2011). This model can also question if welfare users are the most competent to identify what is in their best interest. Such a paternalistic approach is rooted in the idea that public services are there for the common good (Asheim, 2005).

Nor has the social model been exempt from criticism, particularly from post-structuralists who have argued that separating impairment from disability is untenable (Thomas, 2007). This argument is fundamentally an internal one carried on by disability writers and theorists and is beyond the scope of this discussion. However, central to all of the iterations of the social model is how disabled people are conceptualised. Regardless of the role of industrialisation, what is argued is that the way society is structured, and the way that people then behave within that structure, excludes people with impairments. Whilst this provides a powerful insight into how in general people interact with disability, it becomes less cohesive when considering the issue of employment. At one and the same time there is both the claim for inclusion in work, and for consideration of the limitations of some people when it comes to gainful employment. Whilst this could be accepted as a reflection of the wide and heterogeneous nature of impairment and disability, there seems to be a more fundamental challenge to be considered.

It is clear that for some disabled people the route to inclusion requires such things as the provision of support, differential treatment within the workplace, and account being taken of their limitations within the working role. This then leads to considering the basis for acting in this way. In other words, what is the justification for adopting such an approach? Any answers to such a question seem fundamentally rooted in how people think about disability, and such thinking will be used to justify how they should (or do) behave. Whilst the social model can offer an explanation around how disabled

people are conceptualised by others, it does not set out a systematic approach to the barriers and challenges that are seen to hold disabled people down (Basas, 2008).

Hence it can be seen that when conceptualising disability there are tensions between conflicting perspectives. Both the medical and social models of disability recognise the negative life experiences of people with impairments. But they attribute these negative experiences to different causes, the medical model grounding them in the individual and tragic nature of impairment, whilst the social model holds that the cause lies in the nature of society and its dysfunctional and exclusionary response to impairment. Whilst the differences may not be as stark as some have presented them, these different conceptualisations become important when considering the justification for support for disabled people, particularly in regard to employment, an issue which will be explored further in later sections.

What is not contested is the profound impact both models have had. The traditional medical model has been instrumental in establishing the long-standing approach to disability that is still highly prevalent within society. Nor is it contested that the social model has had significant impact, helping galvanise the drive around disability equality and influencing how people think and act towards disabled people. It is the impact of these conceptualisations on social policy and employment practice that is central to this discussion, and which will be the subject of the next four sections.

## **The policy context**

This section will consider two major drivers in regard to government policy making around disability and employment. The first is the passing of anti-discrimination legislation around disability, specifically the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, and subsequent amendments culminating in the incorporation of the DDA into the Equality Act 2010.<sup>2</sup> Although there has been other legislation passed in regard to disability, the DDA appears the most relevant to this literature review as it brought in clear provision

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<sup>2</sup> As will be explained later the EA superseded the DDA. Whilst there are some differences, generally the EA incorporated the DDA provisions. Much of the research has been around the DDA, which is still relevant given the nature of the EA. In this section references to the DDA and the EA are used on the basis that they are generally equivalent in nature.

for disability rights that impacted widely across society, including the sphere of employment. The second driver is less specific, being the impact of neo-liberalism, which is regarded as the dominant political ideology of recent times, and hence has been a major force in social policy making. Neo-liberalist conceptualisation of citizenship is significant to how many disadvantaged groups are regarded, including disabled people, and has been a critical influence on employment policy. This section concludes by identifying that these two drivers do not support a resolution of the conflicting thinking over disability. Neo-liberalism is seen as antagonistic to notions of support for disabled people, and at odds with the espoused aims of the Equality Act. Perhaps more significantly the Equality Act is seen as balancing the needs of disabled workers and employers, an approach that can be seen as a compromise and hence highlighting the tension that is inherent throughout the issue of employment and disability. Not only does the Equality Act fail to provide the comprehensive legal framework that the disability movement sought, it illustrates the ambivalence that emerges from the conceptual tensions that are unresolved over the issue of disability and employment.

The passing of the DDA in 1995 is seen as a result of the pressure brought to bear by the disability movement for legislation around rights for disabled people (Evans, 1996). Although much of the theorising that produced the social model was undertaken by academics, the drive for change around disability rights was firmly rooted in the disability rights movement, which was overtly political, emancipatory in intent and highly effective in raising awareness and mobilising support (Barnartt et al, 2001). Whilst heralded at the time as a major step in the struggle for disability equality (Shah and Priestley, 2011), as will be discussed later, it has also been the subject of sharp criticism, both in terms of its content and its impact.

The DDA was intended to provide disabled people with protection from discrimination, which echoes anti-discrimination legislation around areas such as sex and race, in that it was:

‘An Act to make it unlawful to discriminate against disabled persons in connection with employment, the provision of goods, facilities and services...’ (Disability Discrimination Act, 1995)



The Act contained specific provisions around employment, which came into force in December 1996. This included the notion of reasonable adjustments, which includes changes to, not only the physical arrangements within the workplace, but also how work was arranged in terms of such things as working hours, allocation of duties and so forth. Employers were obliged to make such adjustments, and at last disabled workers were able to bring a legal challenge against discriminatory behaviour (Foster, 2007). Subsequently the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 was passed, which amongst other things brought in further duties around disability discrimination for public bodies (Disability Discrimination Act, 2005)

The DDA was superseded by the Equality Act (EA) of 2010. The Government's overall summary of its purpose in relation to disability is set out by the Office of Disability Issues:

'The Equality Act 2010 (EA) streamlines and strengthens anti-discrimination legislation across the board. It generally carries forward the protection previously provided by the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA). It also strengthens protection and links it more closely to other equality measures.' (Office of Disability Issues, 2013)

Whilst the EA generally carried forward the protection provided for disabled people by the DDA, there were some differences, including widening the scope of protection against direct discrimination from beyond employment and related areas, introducing the principle of indirect discrimination, extending the protection from harassment to beyond work, and protecting from discrimination due to association with disabled people or from false perceptions of disability. The EA also was clear that discrimination could be justified if it was a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim, but that reasonable adjustments should be made if the disabled person would be at a substantial disadvantage compared to non-disabled people if they were not made. It also limited the type of inquiries that can be made by an employer when going through a recruitment process (Office of Disability Issues, 2013)

The EA also brought in a slightly different definition of disability compared to the DDA. Whilst it retained the definition of a disabled person as someone who has a mental or physical impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on the person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities, it dispensed with linking this

to specific capacities such as mobility, speech or hearing (Office of Disability Issues, 2013).

Hence, whilst there is some commonality in the approach to disability compared to other areas of discrimination, disability legislation is both more complex (Taylor, 2010) and fundamentally different to other legislation. This is because, uniquely in the field of anti-discriminatory legislation, it requires the provision of accommodations that would not necessarily be offered to people who are not disabled (Davies and Friedland, 2007). This legal basis for justifying more favourable treatment also acts as a block on non-disabled people challenging an employer over the steps they have taken to support a disabled worker (Hepple, 2011). As such, positive discrimination is deemed lawful (Taylor, 2010), as is organisations taking into account their resources (Goss and Goss, 1998), the cost benefits to the business, and how disruptive it might be for other staff (Curtis, 2003) when making accommodations.

These latter points illustrate how the concept of reasonableness is inherent to the legislation: the provider of services is entitled to make a judgment as to what is reasonable for their organisation to bear in making an accommodation (Taylor, 2010). Likewise, the disabled person has to be at risk of substantial disadvantage before an employer's duty to make adjustments takes effect (Hepple, 2011). Both of these points raise the issue of how are these thresholds to be determined. Whilst the final arbiters of whether a decision is reasonable is the court or tribunals (Davies and Friedland, 2007), there is no specific stipulation as to what constitutes reasonableness (Taylor, 2010), a concept which when applied to accommodations is difficult to define (Basas, 2008).<sup>3</sup> It is worth noting that the Access to Work Scheme<sup>4</sup> was brought in to cover

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<sup>3</sup> Defining what is reasonable seems a universal problem : for example in response to a request to define how far should an employer go in response to the Canadian equivalent of the DDA, the following advice was given

‘Employers are required to accommodate workers with disabilities up to the point of undue hardship to the business. Undue hardship means excessive disruption or interference with the employer’s operation, or financial costs that would be prohibitive to the point that it would alter the essential nature or substantially affect the viability of the enterprise.’ (Konrad et al, 2007)

Whilst this is clearly a fair attempt to provide usable advice, it remains full of contestable terms such as ‘undue’, ‘excessive’, and ‘substantially’. It seems clear that reasonableness remains something that requires some form of subjective judgement.

additional costs that were seen as unreasonable (Bell and Heitmuller, 2005). The inference of this approach is that some costs will inevitably be unreasonable for an employer to bear. As has been pointed out, albeit in regard to the Americans with Disabilities Act 1990 (which has a similar proviso for 'undue hardship' for employers), the legislation does not really provide a right to disabled workers, as it is reliant on how the employer weighs up the situation (Russell, 2002). It is also the case that any challenge to a decision would have to be made by a person who believed they had been discriminated against, meaning the DDA is focused on the individual (Barnes and Mercer 2003). That it is focused on the individual and their need for individual accommodations is clear (Konrad et al, 2007). For example, the advice of the Equality and Human Rights Commission on the EA given to employers states:

'The duty to make reasonable adjustments aims to make sure that, as far as is reasonable, a disabled worker has the same access to everything that is involved in doing and keeping a job as a non-disabled person.'

'When the duty arises, you are under a positive and proactive duty to take steps to remove or reduce or prevent the obstacles a disabled worker or job applicant faces.'

'You only have to make adjustments where you are aware – or should reasonably be aware - that a worker has a disability' (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2013)

In focusing so clearly on the individual the EA does not lay on the private sector any particular duty to provide generally accessible workplaces (Government Equalities Office, 2013), or to anticipate the needs of disabled people (Hepple, 2011; Bell and Heitmuller,2005). The significance of this is that whilst there is no duty to be proactive (Goss et al, 2000) the legislation places a great emphasis on what the employer anticipates might be involved in an individual case, in order to determine what might be reasonable for them to do. As such the viewpoints of employers, in terms of how they conceptualise disability, become central to how the rights under the DDA/EA are realised. This issue will be explored in detail later in the review.

Whilst the DDA has been seen as significantly improving the understanding of disability within society (Gooding, 2000), it has also been criticised on a number of grounds and

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<sup>4</sup> Access to Work is a specific governmental scheme providing financial support to employers to cover the costs of practical help, including equipment, travel costs and support within work. Employers are required to share the costs, although the government puts in the majority of the costs above threshold limits (Gov.UK, 2013)

was seen by many disabled people as a bitter disappointment (Evans, 1996). Some critics of the DDA have argued that rather than it being based on the social model conceptualisation of disability, it is in fact based on the medical model (Barnes and Mercer, 2003; Morris, 1999). Others have seen it as a way of the Government making employers pick up some of the costs of its own labour market policies (Davies and Freidland, 2007), which supports a more general view that government policies around disabled people have been driven by an imperative to reduce overall costs to the state (Danieli and Wheeler, 2006). Indeed it has been questioned if the DDA was robust enough to deliver civil rights for disabled people, which links to a general scepticism about the commitment of the government of the time around disability issues (Goss et al, 2000).

Whether or not the DDA had a significant impact on the employment prospect of disabled people is also contested. The picture around this issue is mixed, with evidence being presented in favour of a positive impact on employment rates for disabled people (Duff et al, 2006), whilst others have asserted that it has had no positive employment impact (Bell and Heitmuller, 2005; Jones and Jones, 2008). Not only is the DDA criticised for only being concerned with the impact on the individual rather than focusing on the disabling barriers within organisations (Morris, 1999), but also, as Foster (2007:82) rather graphically puts it, for forcing disabled workers ‘to beg for conditions that enable them to continue working.’ It has been pointed out that whilst the provision of increased rights may make disabled people more confident about seeking work, it may also mean that employers may then be less likely to take on disabled people due to their concerns over possible costs (Bell and Heitmuller, 2005). The onus is on the individual to take action against an employer (Duff et al, 2006), which provides only limited protection (Barnes, 2000), a point reinforced by analysis (albeit up to 2004) that showed employers were extremely successful in contesting DDA issues legally (Konur, 2007)<sup>5</sup>. The DDA, as with other anti-discrimination legislation, is primarily about creating disincentives for discrimination (Vanhala, 2006), and on its own cannot undo the disadvantages built into society (Gooding, 2000).

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<sup>5</sup> This does not appear to be exclusive to the UK. Egan (2007:513) reports an ‘enormously high’ rate of victory for American employers who have faced claims under the ADA.

Furthermore, the New Labour administration via the DTI asserted that:

‘equality is about recognising and getting the right people for the job’ ... [Equality] Law is designed to cleanse the decision-making process, so that choices are made on the basis of merit, without reference to other considerations.’(Vanhala, 2006: 562)

This feels a long way from the aspirations around re-conceptualising work or delivering non-competitive workplaces. Whilst it places requirements on employers to consider disability and to make reasonable accommodations, the decision making process remains firmly at the discretion of the employer. As such it is a general provision setting down the legislative framework for disability rights, influential when it comes to employment policy making, but not necessarily delivering the fundamental changes sought by the social model conceptualisation of disability. However, when considering what policy was put into place around disability and employment (which will be discussed in a further section), it is necessary to also consider the broader political ideology influencing social policy creation at that time, that of neo-liberalism and the growth of the ‘New Right’.

The ascendancy of neo-liberalism, which is regarded by some as delivering a moral and intellectual rationale for capitalism (O’Brian and Penna, 1998), is seen to be linked to concerns over the nature of welfare provision, which was held to have weakened both the economy (Beresford and Holden, 2000) and the moral fibre of the country (Borsay, 2005). In the area of work and welfare it has been a driving force in the development of workfare based employment policies (Desai and Imrie, 1998; Harris et al, 2012), linking more tightly entitlement to benefits with entering employment (Evans and Cerny, 2003). This reinforces the notion that the primary role of government is supporting people into work rather than supporting them against the impact of unemployment (Peters, 2003). This is important to disabled people in terms of both government policy direction, and the impact on how they as disabled people are perceived within society.

As has been pointed out, the capability to undertake work is the key point on which the government bases their definition of disability (Priestley, 2003), which then points to what those who are defined as non-disabled will be required to tolerate in terms of illnesses, impairments and difficulties within their ordinary working lives (Stone, 1984). The neo-liberalist focus on the self-reliant individual (Chouninard, 2010) intent on

pursing their own ends (Sandel, 1992) is central to this issue, as it holds work as a duty (Fisher, 2007) and the requirement for welfare support as in some way shameful (Sennett, 1998). Indeed it has been suggested that the rhetoric of the current Coalition administration casts those on benefits as in some way deceitful, a view underpinned by scepticism about whether or not people are actually able to work when they claim otherwise (Garthwaite, 2011). The requirements of the markets around competition and productivity are paramount, the role of the worker being to adapt and support the changing nature of business as it responds to the demands of globalisation, demands that ensure economic policy has priority over welfare policy (Beresford and Holden, 2000). Welfare is seen as a burden, and whilst those who are unable to work at all due to disability are seen as deserving of support, it is as non-productive people who through no fault of their own cannot act as self-reliant citizens. Generally governments want at one and the same time to provide support to those seen as in genuine need, whilst also ensuring that those who are seen as taking advantage of welfare are prevented from doing so, in order to preserve the work ethic that is central to capitalism (Drake, 2001). The work ethic is seen as fundamental to economic success (if not survival), and this must be reinforced by ensuring that people feel impelled to seek work due to the significant income differentials maintained between those who work and those who do not (Borsay, 1997).

Whilst it has been noted that the advance of neo-liberalism ideology is at odds with the development of a rights based approach to disability (Harris et al, 2012), what is perhaps more significant is to consider how these approaches seem to impact on how disability is conceptualised. To dismiss the idea of anti-discriminatory legislation and reasonable accommodations as anything other than significant would be unfair: it reflects the need for adjustments to be made for disabled people in order to facilitate them being included more fully in society and in work. But the notion of individual accommodations reflects the notion that the problem still lies with the individual. Society is to accommodate the individual; it is not, however, required to restructure and reassess its general ways of functioning and thinking to create a barrier free society. The advent of ramps and adapted street furniture, admirable though these things are, is not the comprehensive reshaping of society that the social model demands as a solution to the oppression disabled people feel they endure.

This is reinforced by the caveat of reasonableness, which clearly signals there is the possibility of unreasonable expectations, a decision that at least in the first place lies in the hands of the non-disabled majority, and more specifically the employer. Hence accommodating disabled people can be seen as accommodating the burden of disability, which will only be contemplated if it is not unreasonable, nor any threat to the underlying norms. Depending on one's perspective, this can be seen as a sensible and balanced approach, or as a compromise that satisfies neither the aspirations of disabled people nor the concerns of employers. And the neo-liberalist agenda in many ways can be seen to reinforce the norm of the productive citizen, defined by their participation in competitive employment in order to not be reliant on shameful and wasteful welfare. Whilst the rhetoric is that disabled people can be seen as deserving of welfare, it still casts them into the role of 'not fitting in' to the working world. The alternative is indeed to fit in, support the economic system and be productive. Neo-liberalism is not going to support the dilution of the competitive society, nor does it entertain any threat to the work ethic. Whilst neo-liberalism might applaud the notion of a disabled person being independent through work, the expectation is that this happens by people adapting to work, and not the reverse.

Hence within the policy context the conceptual tensions around disability are not resolved. The general neo-liberalist climate is antagonistic to support in general, whilst the DDA (and now EA) provides rights for disabled people but then balances them against the perceived requirements of employers. In locating the issues of disability in the individual the DDA is seen to be actually grounded in the medical model of disability, and as such falls well short of providing the comprehensive legal framework that the social model requires. Whilst it is tempting to characterise the EA as offering 'balance', it is also possible to perceive this as ambivalence. Disabled people are to be endowed with rights, but when it comes to the field of employment the employer holds the casting vote, that of the reasonableness of any accommodation. It has the feel of a 'fudge', echoing the failure to resolve the conceptual tension at the root of this issue.

The next section will take the discussion to the next stage, considering the approach around employment policy, particularly the New Deal initiative that was heralded as a new approach to bringing people into work, including disabled people.

## Employment policy and disability

This section will consider how governments since the advent of the New Labour administration in 1997 have responded to the issue of disabled people and employment.<sup>6</sup> The general approach to work participation under New Labour will be outlined, which linked rights to responsibilities and integrated labour-market reforms with welfare reform, alongside a significant intent to bring more disabled people into employment. The overall approach is identified as a form of workfare, which was delivered through the New Deal, and the New Deal for Disabled People (NDDP). This approach will be examined in terms of the implications for disabled people and the social model. The approach of the Coalition administration is then examined, which is seen as a continuation of the general New Labour workfare approach. Finally this section will consider the significance of this approach in regard to how disabled people are conceptualised as workers within the labour market. In particular it will identify that the general approach has not resolved the tensions between the requirements of employers and disabled people, re-inforcing the central importance of how disabled people are conceptualised by employers to the employment experiences of disabled people. This unresolved tension, rooted as it is in the different conceptualisations of disability, is a source of conflict that these, and indeed other government initiatives, have failed to reconcile.

The New Labour approach has been held to be a continuation of the long term approach of previous administrations that neglected demand-side initiatives around the labour market and chose rather to focus on the supply-side and how to move individual disabled people into employment (Barnes et al, 1999; Lewis, 2003). Their approach to support around work and worklessness was rooted in laying obligations on those accessing benefits (Evans and Cerny, 2003), expressed in simple terms such as 'no rights without obligations' (Giddens 1998:65) and 'work for those who can, security for those who can't' (DSS, 1998:29). Such thinking was espoused by leading New

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<sup>6</sup> Taking a longer historical perspective at this point is entirely feasible. The justification for using the advent of the New Labour administration is that the passing of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 gave a clear impetus to disability policy, and the New Labour administration introduced specific and significant disability policy around employment. Extending the scope of this section would be of interest, but would not add significantly to the discussion that is focused on current practice and policy



Labour luminaries such as Giddens (1998), who was clear that with rights must come responsibilities. Hence any increase in the rights and entitlements of the individual must be accompanied by greater expectations over the obligations owed by the individual, and this must be the case for all members of society, not just welfare beneficiaries. As Morris (2007:44) points out ‘.. under New Labour, to receive a right the individual must offer up some obligation in exchange ..’, which links to New Labour’s doubts about asking people to *choose* to work. Any approach such as the New Deal was not to be based on any presumption that the unemployed were innately possessed of the work ethic, and hence sanctions would be part of the process (Hyde, 2000). Reforming the labour market and the welfare system were closely linked, focusing on eliminating disincentives for people to enter work whilst improving the supply of skills and increasing flexibility (Hay, 2004).

Inherent to the general approach was building up competitiveness between workers (Gleeson, 1997) and reducing the use of protective working environments for disabled people (such as sheltered workshops) in favour of working conditions that are rooted in openness and competition (Hyde, 2000). Paid employment was the core driver for policy making under New Labour (Easterlow and Smith, 2003), seeing employment as primarily a supply-side issue (Hay, 2004) and reinforcing the Government’s view that employment was a duty. Paid work was the vehicle by which people should achieve independence, a goal that unqualified social rights could undermine, although some degree of social protection would still be needed (Mead, 1986 cited in Hyde, 2000). This applied as much to disabled people as anyone else, the approach being again to focus on the supply-side of labour (Roulstone, 2000; Burton and Kagan, 2006; Hyde, 2000) rather than the demand side. To further emphasise the centrality of work as a goal for disabled people, access to state support was tightened, as were assessments of people’s capabilities, whilst encouraging disabled people into voluntary or poorly paid work through monetary incentives (Hyde, 2000).

The centrepiece of New Labour policy around employment in general was the New Deal. Launched in 1997 it targeted lone parents, the long term unemployed and young people. Its aim was to improve people’s employment skills and to support people to move into employment as rapidly as possible (Finn, 2003; Carpenter and Speeden, 2007), with potential negative impacts on people’s benefits if those targeted declined

to participate (Finn, 2000). It was followed by the New Deal for Disabled People (NDDP), which was launched on a national scale in 2002 following a pilot phase (Dickens et al, 2003). Unlike the New Deal it was established as a voluntary programme, providing focused support via personal advisors whilst people looked for work and for a period of six months after obtaining a job (Heenan, 2003).

The overall New Deal approach was generally seen as welfare-to-work, seeing work as the way out of poverty amidst concerns from politicians about the need to use productive work as a means to retrieve a group of people who were being lost to society (Levitas, 2005). Also described as workfare, with increased conditionality in regard to welfare and support (Carpenter et al, 2007), the focus was on increasing an individual's skills and motivation in regard to taking on work (Deacon, 2008) in order to boost how marketable someone was to a prospective employer (Barnes and Mercer, 2003). As an approach it was about both boosting the individual's effort and motivation in seeking work, and increased oversight and sanctions (Carpenter et al, 2007).

The New Deal approach has provoked mixed responses. Some have seen the New Deal as in line with the drive for disability rights, explaining that:

'...the Labour government has emphasized the desirability of social inclusion through paid work, so the disability movement has argued for equal rights in the workplace. Just as the DDA acknowledges some social dimensions to discrimination against disabled people, so the disability rights movement has demanded a primary emphasis on the socially constructed nature of disability. Just as the government has argued that we must distinguish between disabled people who can work and those who can't work and ensure that the latter are financially supported by the state, so the disability rights movement has campaigned for adequate financial support for disabled people who are unable to work. Just as the government has stated, 'This government wants to give marginalized and excluded people a hand up not a hand out' (Department of Social Security, 1998) so the disability movement has publicly rejected charities as a source of help for disabled people.' (Danieli and Wheeler, 2006 : 276)

Others have been more critical, seeing the New Deal as focusing on the individual (and hence the need for them to change) rather than the 'unchanging world of work' (Oliver, 2009:46), and the workplace barriers that prevent disabled people from working (Drake, 2000), a situation compounded by other issues such as inaccessible

transport systems (Barnes and Mercer, 2003). The centrality of the individual is clear: the assumption is that the individual is to blame for their need for welfare rather than seeing them as excluded from work (Carpenter et al, 2007), their requirement for benefits a sign that they have not taken responsibility for themselves (Burton and Kagan, 2006). The NDDP was seen to artificially divide people into those who can work or those who cannot, forcing people assessed as having the capacity to work into the labour market but not providing the support necessary for them to compete on equal terms (Beresford and Holden, 2000). This perhaps reflects the general principle of the welfare state that defines people as disabled and as such unable to work, or able to work and consequently classified as non-disabled (Beyer, 1999). For some disabled people the New Deal's focus on work presents an impossible challenge that undermines their concept of themselves as a disabled person (Heenan, 2002). Whilst it was acknowledged that labour markets could become accessible to disabled people, it was argued that the practicalities of employment for some disabled people needed to be considered, and that

‘Good employment practices within organisations are a necessary means to changing this status quo, but – even with some backing from the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 – they are not likely to be sufficient to open up the labour market as long as profit maximisation remains the bottom line.’  
(Easterlow and Smith, 2003:516)

With the change in political administration in 2010, the overall policy was reviewed. The Government policy for changing the welfare to work programme was put forward under the banner ‘Get Britain Working’. One of the key elements of overall policy approach was ‘The Work Programme’. Brought forward as a major change in approach to welfare-to-work the Government claimed it offered significant alternatives to the previous approach, including a more individualised and flexible approach whilst offering better value for money through using payment by results. Providers were to be paid from the funding recouped from getting people into work, an approach that envisaged as a partnership between public, private and voluntary sector providers and the Government (Department of Works and Pensions, 2011).

In terms of disabled people the Government launched ‘Work Choice’, which was to focus on those with the most intensive support needs and who faced the more challenging problems in entering work. Using external providers, the offer was a range

of programmes and workplace adjustments (including Access to Work), delivered using a series of 'modules' offering short and longer term support (DirectGov, 2011). The New Deal was not to end entirely, but was to become a voluntary initiative operating through job brokers in some parts of the country, trying to match disabled people to suitable vacancies (Business Link, 2011).

Whilst the Government confidently claimed its policies are based on the social model (DirectGov, 2011)<sup>7</sup> it is hard to reconcile this with the approach espoused by the New Deal or Work Choice. The requirement is for disabled people to fit into work, or to lapse into welfare. The mechanism for individual accommodations was available via the DDA, as was individual support through the NDDP, but it remains that the legislative and social policy framework has not made any fundamental change to the competitive nature of labour or business. Indeed it has reinforced it, as the onus is on the individual to make themselves fit for work, the notion appearing to be that somewhere there would be a job that a disabled person could fit into if only they tried hard enough.

Whilst many disabled people can and do fit readily into work (with or without specific government support schemes) an important issue is how the New Deal as the flagship employment policy contributed to the conceptualisation of disability. And on this point it seems not to have confronted the fundamental dilemma of how to reconcile the expectations of business around the capacity of their employees with the aspirations of disabled people around a barrier-free workplace. Despite the drive to encourage and support employers, and the allocation of some rights to disabled people, the New Deal (and its successor approach) continued to leave the decision-making process in the hands of employers. Whilst this may seem unsurprising, the importance of this is that the conceptualisations of disability by employers, and their subsequent attitude and behaviour towards disabled people, remains central to the experience and outcomes for disabled workers. The lack of consensus over the basis of disability, highlighted throughout, remains a key tension that has a direct impact on how key

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<sup>7</sup> Whilst this claim was clearly made at the time of the Work Choice launch, it is interesting to note that more recently such claims seem to have been expunged from current Government websites

stakeholders respond to the issue of employment. Accordingly the next section will consider the experiences of disabled people around employment and the response of their employers.

## **Experiences of disabled people**

There are considerable insights to be gained from the range of studies undertaken into the experiences and attitudes of disabled people. Many of these are surveys or interviewed-based research, with little evidence of direct observation. A significant number of the studies considered disability alongside other categories, especially long term illness. A number of these studies involved people on welfare benefits, again often combining disabled people and people who were classed as long term sick. Indeed sickness and disability are often used interchangeably, and a range of long term illnesses are regarded as disabilities, although this cannot be applied to all illnesses. This section will cover a number of areas of disabled people's experiences of work, firstly their general expectations of work, then their experiences of recruitment, workplace accommodations, managers and co-workers. The value of this section is that it highlights that their experiences testify to on-going discrimination and disadvantage, despite the efforts of policymakers and legislators to promote employment equality for disabled people. More significantly it illuminates the degree to which that experience is rooted in how they are seen, or at least how they feel they are seen, by those they work for and with, and how this impacts on their own expectations and responses. It provides evidence that the way in which people conceptualise disability is central to how disabled people are then treated in regard to employment. It then leads onto the next section, which deals with the strategic responses of employers to disability, and then the following section which deals with their specific approaches to key elements of the employment process.

### ***General expectations of work***

The overall picture presented by disabled people in terms of their expectations and attitude to work attitude to work is mixed. Easterlow and Smith (2003) identified in a study of people with long standing illness that there was no support to the idea that

they were unmotivated or disinterested in the jobs market, but rather were well-informed around searching for work. Indeed they found that people were prepared to stay in work even if this was detrimental to their health. However, a number of studies show that a proportion of disabled people feel that they cannot work or do not expect to work. The reasons cited by this group in taking this position include ill-health or disability (Kemp and Davidson, 2007; Sejersen et al, 2009; Tu and Ginnis, 2012; Becker et al 2010), that they cannot do any work (Beatty et al, 2009), that they have no plans to work (Tu and Ginnis,2012; Connolly and Hales, 2009), or that they have reservations about their employability (Kemp and Davidson, 2007), although in this regard people see it as both an issue of their disability and a shortage of jobs and skills. These studies tended to be of people on benefits or being supported to find work, and people who did not feel able or expect to work were always in a minority, with the majority of people expressing more positive attitudes towards work. These negative views appear to be to a degree entrenched, with some people stating they did not consider that there was anything that would help support them into work (Connolly and Hales, 2009; Tu and Ginnis, 2012).

These studies indicate that some people who regard themselves as disabled also regard this as leaving them unable to work, although there are other factors in play. There is evidence that some people who are not working feel trapped and conditioned to this position (Strickler et al, 2009), whilst Roessler et al, (2001:27) speculate that disabled people (in this case people with multiple sclerosis) may be so convinced that employers will discriminate against them that it becomes a 'self-fulfilling prophecy'. Not all disabled people who feel unable to work relate this to their disability. Molloy et al (2003) argue that it depends on their conceptualisation, dividing people into social model believers who relate it due to lack of adaptations and support (which if resolved would mean they would be able to work), and those more aligned to medical model stance who were more likely to conclude they could not work due to the severity of condition. This division between people who attribute their inability to work to the failure to provide them with necessary adjustments and those who see it simply down to the impact of their impairments is found in other studies (Lock et al, 2005). How much people like work is a factor, in that some people seem hugely attracted to their work whilst others feel they will struggle to find work that fits with their preferences

(Strickler et al, 2009). This evidence points to attitudes being central to disabled people's assessment of their ability to work and that there is no homogeneity in their views. For some people it appears that, in matching what they perceive themselves to be capable of against what they anticipate will be required of them in work, they assess themselves as the problem; whereas others focus on their perceptions of the failure of employers to make work accessible. It is the dichotomy expressed by some disabled people between seeing the problem as personal or as organisational (Foster and Fosh, 2010).

A similar dichotomy can be found around other issues: for example for some disabled people concerns over how work impacts on their benefits is a barrier (Grewal et al, 2002), such that they need the security of knowing they can go back onto their previous benefits if they start and then stop work (Connolly and Hales, 2009). However, another study (of people with mental health problems) found that one of the benefits of going to work was the financial benefits (Schneider et al, 2009). The above insights highlight that the issue of disability creates different perspectives in regard to employment, and how people think about employment is linked to how they think about disability. The following comments from a study of human resource practice around disability in the hotel trade give a picture of expectations in this case of HR managers:

‘ There is a lack of understanding by our able employees about employees with disabilities not doing the full job. This could lead to a snowball effect - if this person with a disability does not need to do everything, then I do not need to do everything.’

‘ ..as a high-end hotel, its customers expect speed, efficiency, and quality service of the hotel's employees.’

‘ “most of the people that come in and apply aren't coming in a wheelchair,” resulting in limited applications by people with disabilities.’  
(Groschl, 2004: 23-24)

The position in regard to people with mental health problems is also challenging, in that employers have stereotypical ideas about mental illness that leads them to assume that this inevitably will impair someone's ability to undertake work (Rolfe et al, 2006). To have the diagnosis of schizophrenia means in the eyes of most employers someone is practically unemployable (Roberts et al, 2004).

When considering the general perceptions around disability and employment, it appears that some disabled people have low expectations around work which are in part related to their sense that employers are (and will be) negative. Their experience of employers is that they demonstrate a mixture of expectations around disabled people which seem influenced by a number of factors, including a strong theme around negative attitudes. Whilst there is evidence that the reality of employing disabled people does not match the preconceptions held by employers, the influence of how they think about disability remains a potent issue for disabled people seeking to work. The next sections will consider in more detail issues relating to employment process, starting with recruitment.

### ***Experiences of recruitment***

Disabled people's perceptions of recruitment is often negative, assuming that employers cannot believe they are able to take on the job they are after (Molloy et al 2003), or that their mental health problems will be seen as too much of a risk to give them much chance of being interviewed or appointed (Hudson et al, 2009). Such views are backed up by evidence of direct discrimination such as exercises in sending identical applications from disabled and non-disabled people (Arthur and Zarb, 1995). However, it is not necessarily uniformly negative: for example a study of people with openly acknowledged cystic fibrosis showed some employers were positive, whilst others were negative and denied people work chances (Edwards and Boxall, 2010). Some disabled people linked negative attitudes from employers to the competition for jobs (Duckett, 2000), meaning that they would not be the employer's first choice (Nice and Davidson, 2010). Other issues identified that contribute to disabled people's negative expectations around the recruitment process range from the practicalities of the recruitment process making it very difficult for them, through to the nervousness of non-disabled people interviewing disabled people (Duckett, 2000). This latter study identified that some disabled people felt they had to prove themselves above and beyond other interviewees due to the negativity they encountered in employment interviews, whereas for some disabled people (who chose not to disclose their history of disability) the priority was not to have allowances made for them due to their disability but to be treated in a similar fashion to other interviewees (Heenan, 2002).



### ***Experiences of workplace accommodations***

When considering the issues of workplace accommodations, there are a range of terms used, including adaptations (which tend to refer to physical changes or aids within the workplace), adjustments (which tend to mean changes to role and nature of a job), and accommodations (which is a more generic term covering changes). However, it does appear these terms can be used interchangeably on occasions, with accommodations being the most widely used term to cover the general approach to making changes within the workplace in regards to disability.

Unsurprisingly disabled people generally report that accommodations help them to remain in work longer than they would otherwise would have been able to do so (Kemp and Davidson, 2007), and that accommodations boost their confidence in their own abilities (Solovieva et al, 2010). However, disabled workers' perceptions of employers around this issue can be negative, with the view being that the availability of accommodations is dependent on the willingness of employers (Edwards and Boxall, 2010) who can be concerned with the perceived cost of adjustments (Molloy et al, 2003). A lack of sufficient accommodations has been frequently cited as a barrier to employment (Chouinard, 2010), and a majority of people with a condition that affected their ability to do their role reported that no changes had been made to accommodate them (Kemp and Davidson, 2007). Often disabled people reported struggles in obtaining accommodations: a meta-study of attitudes in the workplace showed that disabled people had to persuade both employers and co-workers that their disability did have an impact on what they could do, in order to make their request for an accommodation seem genuine. However, the paradoxical outcome of such a struggle was that they then risked their competence and reliability being questioned (Gewurtz and Kirsh, 2009). For some the onus was on them to demonstrate flexibility rather than their employers (Edwards and Boxall, 2010), whilst an American study of people with multiple chemical sensitivities (which is seen as poorly recognised as a disability) painted a picture of a protracted battle to ensure managers maintained the agreed accommodations they required (Gibson and Linburg, 2007). Nor is it about major adjustments: basic changes that are seen as essential can be a challenge to arrange (Foster and Fosh, 2010), such as the appropriate technology for people with visual impairments (Buckell, 2008).

Two major themes emerge when reviewing the perceptions of disabled people around what accommodations are helpful, those of flexibility and time off. Flexibility was reported by many disabled people as key to undertaking work. This included the flexibility to work part-time (Connolly and Hales, 2009; Beatty et al, 2009; Lewis et al, 2003), flexibility over breaks (Connolly and Hales, 2009; Gewurtz et al, 2009), flexibility around taking time off at short notice (Hudson et al, 2009; Gewurtz et al, 2009), and working at home (Connolly and Hales, 2009; Irvine, 2008). For many disabled people the use of 'standard' flexibilities used by all was seen as useful (Hudson et al, 2009) if not essential (Grewal et al, 2002). Although it is interesting to note that for this latter group only fifty percent of them reported that such arrangements had been specially agreed. But there are also reports of flexibility being contested: Gewurtz et al (2009:40) identified that 'working on demand' was valued by employers who expected all staff to work whatever and however many hours were needed by the company, an expectation many disabled people could not meet. As such holidays, compulsory overtime, sickness absence and even toilet breaks were organised to the advantage of the company rather than in line with what the employee needed. Edwards and Boxall's (2010) study of people in work with cystic fibrosis found they were expected to undertake the same work patterns as their co-workers. While Foster and Fosh (2010) argue that organisations that did not have any procedures for sorting out accommodations were more likely to not understand how disabled people had to struggle to obtain what they were actually entitled to.

The issue of time off was an issue, in that disabled people believed employers would discriminate against them on the grounds that they would be taking more time off. Disabled people can fall into two groups, those who dispute they would take more time off (and hence see such discrimination as unjustified) and those who accepted that it was inevitable (and hence see it as unfair as it was not their fault) (Molloy et al, 2003). There is evidence to support both responses, in that on the one hand many people on incapacity benefits see full time employment as a risk as they may need to take time off, especially if their condition is one that fluctuates (Beatty et al, 2009). Indeed Pinder (1995) concluded that organisations struggled with the impact of periodic ill-health as they needed people to be either clearly fit or clearly ill. Yet on the other hand there is evidence that many disabled people will work when ill

(Collingwood, 2011), when they should have taken sick leave (Young and Bhaumik, 2011), and when non-disabled people would have taken sick leave (Molloy et al, 2003). People with mental health problems may do this due to being anxious over how they will be judged for going off sick, to the point where their efforts to remain productive and hide their problems could be damaging their health (Irvine, 2008).

### ***Experience of managers and co-workers***

When it comes to the issue of management and support, as has been alluded to earlier, some disabled people are open about their impairments, whilst others choose not to disclose or even to hide their impairments. The issue of disclosure also divides the employers in how they respond: talking to them about one's condition may be helpful, or it may not (Kemp and Davidson, 2007). When it comes to mental health problems, the general picture is that employers respond positively, but this is not universal (Hudson et al, 2009). It is less positive in terms of reporting discrimination within the workplace, with one US study showing when people did identify it was happening it was unusual for it to be resolved positively in the view of the disabled person (Roessler et al, 2011).

How understanding an employer is perceived to be is central to disabled people in work. Employers who grasp what someone's health problems involve are seen as helpful in maintaining them in work (Lewis et al, 2003), whilst those who make accommodations for people with mental health problems can be seen as more concerned and caring, helping people in turn to be more satisfied and committed in their work (Kirsh, 2000). However, it is interesting to note that where people with mental health issues bring into work problems related to the stresses and strains of their home situation, some employers see that such things are outside the scope of their responsibilities (Rolfe et al, 2006), even though stepping in smartly at this point with support might help reduce the risk of staff absence in due course (Irving, 2011). Indeed Irvine (2011:185) further points out that employers did not respond to people with work-related stress until it became 'medicalised', and this is indicative of a wider issue of how employers tolerate (or not) issues relating to disability. Edwards and Boxall's study (2010) of people with cystic fibrosis shows how employer attitudes can ebb and flow through the employment process:

'At the recruitment stage participants reported employers highlighting concerns about the impairment effects of CF, often at the expense of the participants being employed. However, where they were successful in gaining employment it seems that the impairment effects of CF were 'demedicalised' by many of the employers, who expected the adults with CF to meet the same obligations of employment as their non-disabled peers. If participants were unable to meet these obligations (sometimes because of a lack of appropriate adjustments) their employment was then re-medicalised in order to fulfil criteria for disability schemes or medical retirement..' (p 450)

Likewise Easterlow and Smith (2003) paint an equally graphic picture of how some employers respond to ill-health linked to the disability:

'..that once a period of tolerance has ended, employing organisations do all they can to terminate their responsibilities (sometimes conforming to the requirements but not the spirit of the Disability Discrimination Act) .... However, a charge of discrimination may be hard to sustain when employers insist that the job is still open, place the options in the hands of employees, or persuade employees that there really is no alternative given the difficulties they are experiencing, and the progressive nature of their illness.' (p 253)

The role of managers and supervisors is seen as critical by disabled workers. Criticisms of supervisors can include a lack of support which can increase stress levels within work (Kirsh, 2000), overly harsh evaluation of performance, excessive supervision, allocation of inappropriate tasks, and limiting people to particular roles (Roessler et al, 2011). This latter study also pointed to concerns over terms and conditions and job prospects. The challenges faced by people with mental health problems do seem in some ways more severe: they can face more negative experiences than other disabled people (Synder, et al 2010), whilst Irving (2011) highlights that managers can struggle to understand what is involved in recovering from mental health problems. In contrast what workers with mental health problems sought from their managers were qualities such as 'willingness to provide feedback and to communicate openly, fairness, commitment, supportiveness, a sense of humor, and an ability to convey the worth of the employee.' (Kirsh, 2000:28), Generally, and perhaps unsurprisingly, disabled workers see managers (and co-workers) who are supportive and understanding as essential to arranging accommodations and keeping them going in their jobs (Gewurtz and Kirsh, 2009).

In light of the problems disabled people can face within the workplace, it is understandable that they seek through various ways to influence the views of others, including:

'a) concealing the disability, b) communicating information about the disability to reduce discomfort and clarify norms, c) requesting help to clarify expected behaviors, d) emphasizing similarity to others through shared interests, opinions, and values, and e) becoming a "superworker" to dispel stereotypes and modify others' expectations.' (Stone & Colella, 1996:388, cited in Schur, 2005:11)

This list of strategies is of interest, as it reinforces the pressures disabled workers feel to influence what people think of them, and to challenge how they are conceptualised. They can seek to fit in (including by denial of their impairment and its impact), attempt to justify their position, or seek to overcompensate by proving themselves more capable than their colleagues. This last point would seem indicative of the underlying insecurity that disabled workers can feel, in that without in some way unequivocally proving their worth their position will be insecure. But in contrast it is also argued that they conceive that a poor assessment of their performance is due to unfair views of others, rather than a product of their own poor performance (Sandler & Blanck, 2005 cited in Schur, 2005).

In considering the overall experiences of disabled people around employment there is a strong sense that how they are regarded by others is central to their experiences. Clearly, their accounts are seen through the lens of their own perceptions, and that it cannot be simply assumed that this represents objective reality. However, it does seem clear that their experiences highlight a range of expectations by employers, with a strong negative theme throughout. But the picture is mixed, offering some evidence of the potential for different outcomes, which some disabled workers link to the way their employers view them. Within this there are some emerging themes, including that of a concern within others that disabled people should be in some way 'genuinely' disabled. There is also evidence that employers can tend to expect disabled people to move towards working norms. These seem indicative of a sense of discomfort in treating disabled workers differentially compared to other staff. It is perhaps unsurprising that disabled people express concerns over how their needs as disabled workers may interact, and indeed may conflict with the needs of the organisation. In

this they reflect the fundamental tension inherent to this issue, expressed in how they wish to be conceptualised and how they feel they are conceptualised.

Having considered disabled people's accounts of their experiences around employment, the next two sections consider then the approach of employers, managers and co-workers, disabled workers, and how this can shed light onto the importance and impact of their conceptualisation of disability in driving their approach.

## **The strategic approach of employers to employing disabled people**

This section will consider first the general attitude and approach of employers to disabled people, which appears to be dominated by how people think about disability rather than necessarily being informed by experience. It will then consider the two main approaches adopted by businesses to equality in general (including disability equality), that of equal opportunities and diversity. More specific areas such as productivity, sickness absence, accommodations, recruitment, management and support and co-worker reaction will be considered in the following section. A key theme within this section is how employers approach managing the conflicting agenda they perceive when it comes to employing disabled people. Echoing earlier points made about the failure to deal with the conceptual tensions at the root of the approach to disability and employment, employer attempts to reconcile the perceived conflict between their needs and that of disabled workers appear to manifest themselves in a deeply ambivalent attitude to this issue.

### ***General attitude and approach***

When considering how employers respond to disability one facet of the overall debate is the frequency that *potential* issues are cited – it could be argued that the debate is characterised by a lack of evidence, and that responses are driven primarily by preconceptions. Employers talk more about what they see as the disadvantages of employing disabled people rather than the advantages, perhaps because disadvantages seem more real and immediate compared to advantages which may

take longer to have an impact and can be readily missed (Aston et al, 2005). How an employer perceives a disabled worker becomes important if it is accepted that it would be irrational for an employer to employ someone on the usual terms who they saw as imperfect (Goss et al, 2000). There is substantial evidence that employers believe that disabled people are less able (Fraser et al, 2010), less skilled (Bjelland et al, 2010; Domzal et al, 2008; Bruyère et al, 2004), and that they require extra time to learn new tasks (Strauser and Chan, 2007 cited in Chan et al, 2010). They have expectations of the average worker in a cost-effective environment, and where they are not met due to such things as health problems they will be inclined to move them, gently or otherwise, out of that role (Easterlow and Smith, 2003). They believe that external incentives are required as there is little inducement for them to make specific efforts in regard to employing under-employed groups such as disabled people (Equalities Review, 2007). Indeed it is argued that, as disabled people can access state support, in the minds of employers this option of existing without work means disabled people are less strongly engaged in the labour market (Peck, 1996).

Employer viewpoints do appear mixed when it comes to actually contemplating employing disabled people. Research by the Institute of Manpower Studies identified that whilst only a minority of employers were prepared to say they would never employ a disabled person, far more went on to say that they considered the work they undertook to be unsuitable for disabled people to carry out, or that they would not be able to access the workplace readily. (Arthur and Zarb, 1995). Whilst this pre-dates current legislation, it demonstrates the approach of avoiding the perception of being discriminatory whilst at the same time actually not being prepared to offer job opportunities to disabled people (Barnes, 1992). There does appear to be a gap between what employers say and what they do: as Chan et al (2010:409) put it

‘...employers generally hold moderately positive attitudes toward people with disabilities and express a willingness to hire and retain workers with disabilities. However, there is a huge gap between intention to hire and actual hiring and retention behaviours.’

Employers generally see disabled people as more challenging as employees compared to non-disabled people (Basas, 2008). They tend to define disability in a relatively narrow way (Newton and Ormerod, 2005), mainly focusing on sensory or mobility

impairments (Simm et al, 2007), rather than those which not visually obvious, including mental health problems (Dewson, et al 2010). The way they define disability can be based on the type of work someone is doing (Dewson et al, 2010), whilst different employment sectors have different priorities: the care sector tends to want diverse skills and perspectives, whilst retail organisations see value in an obviously diverse workforce (Aston et al, 2005).

However, their acceptance of disabled people can be seen as a 'vener' (Neath et al, 2007:256), which has echoes of a study into gender equality which reported that companies would do the minimum to meet minimum requirements (Strachan et al, 2004). This superficiality is found elsewhere, with studies showing that some firms may have a commitment to diversity but fail to be explicit over disability as part of this commitment (Ball et al, 2005), or may refer to disability in their annual reports, but only briefly and without showing how the requirements of disabled staff will be effectively catered for (Dibben et al, 2001). Indeed it is identified that there is a range of evidence to support the idea that many employers lack knowledge of both the legal position and their obligations towards disabled people (Foster 2007). Jackson et al (2000) cite a range of findings around the negative attitudes of employers, including their subscription to myths and beliefs about disabled people. Other reviews have collected evidence from a number of sources that indicate negative beliefs about employing disabled people are wide ranging, including concerns over health care costs, need for additional supervision, levels of emotional adjustments and lack of related experience (Bjelland et al, 2010; Gonzales, 2009; Chan et al, 2010). Some employers believe that some roles cannot be effectively done by a disabled person (Domzal et al, 2008), although employers can be less risk adverse around disability when there is a limited supply of qualified workers in a high demand area of work (Chan et al, 2010). Russell (2002) argues that employers expect additional costs with disabled people alongside lower productivity, and this, when considered on a profit and loss basis, leads to discrimination. It is important to note that this relates to the beliefs employers hold. There is evidence that such beliefs can be influenced by the experience of actually employing disabled people.

Employing disabled people tends to give employers more confidence about then employing other disabled people (Aston et al, 2005; Roberts et al, 2004; Arthur and



Zarb, 1995), whilst increased experience of disabled workers can help employers change their views of disabled people as productive workers (Copeland et al, 2010). Size of organisation also appears to be a factor: generally the bigger the firm the greater their awareness of disability (Goss and Goss, 1998) and the greater the chance of them actually employing disabled people (Dewson et al, 2010, Woodhams and Corby, 2007). This may be linked to perceptions of disability, in that larger firms tend to recognise more conditions as disability (Dewson, et al 2010), whilst smaller firms tend to have narrower definitions of disability (Aston et al, 2005).

Whilst the views of employer organisations could not be claimed to either directly reflect the actual views of employers, or be necessarily representative of the broad views of employers as a group, there is some interest in considering their declared view in regard to the approach to disability and the more general issues of equality and diversity. It is interesting that the process of obtaining employees is seen as one that should be competitive (Engineering Employers Federation, 2011) in order to hire the best person for the job (British Chamber of Commerce, 2009). Whilst discrimination is accepted as morally wrong (Institute of Directors, 2000) and that disability discrimination legislation provides guidance for employers to act ethically and responsibly, there is a desire for a balance between resources and the level of protection provided to disabled people (Confederation of British industry, 2009). The system of regulation around equality is an area of general concern, being seen as costly (British Chambers of Commerce, 2010), administratively burdensome, requiring vast technical knowledge by HR staff (Confederation of British Industry, 2009) and unlikely to be effective (British Chambers of Commerce, 2009). It is argued that it is unfair to lay additional burdens on employers as there is no evidence that employers are at fault, and that financial considerations are given insufficient weight when it comes to making decisions over adjustments (Confederation of British Industry, 2009) whilst the concept of reasonable adjustments is itself seen as ambiguous (Institute of Directors, 2000).

### ***Equal opportunities and diversity***

Although the overall position of employers can, perhaps, be best described as ambivalent, there is no doubt that they have to respond to issues of equality in general and anti-discrimination legislation in particular. Although it has been propounded that

a focus on complying with the legal requirements stemming from anti-discrimination legislation is an outdated approach (Employers Forum on Disability, 2012), the overall promotion of equal opportunities has been a key facet in the approach to disability, especially as specific policies on disability are somewhat rarer than general equal opportunities policies (Newton and Ormerod, 2005). Organisations can be seen to introduce equal opportunity policies for a number of reasons, including as an insurance policy, based on the least level of legal requirements in order to support managers and avoid problems occurring, or in order to exhibit responsibility as an employer including adhering to the intent of the law as well as the detail. Other reasons include responding to something that has either happened that the organisation has picked up on or has been brought to their attention from outside, or as a way of seeking competitive advantage linked to widening the recruitment of customer pool (Jewson, 1990, 1992, 1995; cited in Hoque and Noon, 2004:483).

The above motivations can be regarded as either positive reasons, as they can bring some benefits to an organisation, or negative because it was about defending against sanctions and penalties (Dickens, 1999, 2000). Whilst it can also be driven by an altruistic desire to promote equality (Doherty, 2004), the line that has been 'tirelessly promoted' by the DTI and others (Vanhala, 2006:562) is that discrimination denies business the benefits of employing disabled people alongside the prospect of legal sanctions acting as a disincentive to discriminate. However, there is evidence that EO policies are little more than 'empty shells' (Hoque and Noon, 2004:481), and that the fact that an organisation possesses an equal opportunities policy is little indication of what is going on internally (Dickens, 2000). Such a conclusion would infer that EO policies have been adopted due to requirements, rather than as a positive measure that is seen as beneficial to the business. However Hoque and Noon (2004:497) also found the situation appeared to be better where HR or personnel specialists acted as 'guardians of equal opportunities'. A dedicated HR function within an organisation is linked to improved practice around disability, but this is by no means guaranteed (Goss et al, 2000). This could be taken as reinforcing the message that EO was not seen as central to business, in that EO approaches can be seen as not relevant to the best interest of an organisation and hence subverted (Cockburn, 1989) or even abandoned if difficulties arise (Marchington and Wilkinson, 2008). If it is rational for an

organisation to act in a discriminatory way, then likewise it becomes rational for people in that organisation to undermine equal opportunities (Dickens, 2000) and that those championing EO may be doing so from the perspective of defending the organisation rather than promoting the individual.

There has been a move in more recent times away from HR championing the individual and towards a strategic human resource management (HRM) approach (Francis and Keegan, 2006). Given that the main challenge businesses have to deal with is maintaining financial viability, they look to HRM to deliver cost-effective staff (Boxall and Purcell, 2011). The focus is on gaining competitive advantage, with workers being regarded as resources to be utilised to promote efficiency and effectiveness within the organisation (Pauwe and Boselie, 2003). Thus the notion that what benefits the business benefits the individual is now being challenged (Francis and Keegan, 2006), with workers seen as resources who should be moulded in ways that generate the best performance (Marchington and Wilkinson, 2008; Schneider and Barsoux, 2003). Indeed, whilst there may be more employers who actually have equal opportunity policies, it does not follow that this is translated into more opportunities for disadvantaged groups (Hoque and Noon, 2004). As has been pointed out:

‘It seems that when organisations are making money they are too busy to implement best practice HRM and feel that in any case, they are doing well enough without it; and when they lack money, they cannot afford to implement it. (Guest and King, 2004:412)<sup>8</sup>

It is also argued that EO is a simplistic approach that fails to deal with the root of the problem of inequality (Torrington et al, 2011). Even if it was possible to bring about equal opportunities for disabled people, it would still be within a system of work that is intrinsically unequal, the pursuit of profit being rooted in exploitation (Levitas, 1996).

Whilst it is tempting to assume that employers are unable to act ethically without the sanctions imposed through legislation, there is some evidence that this is not wholly

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<sup>8</sup> Guest and King researched the attitudes of senior managers to HR, and did not specifically categorise the content of ‘best practice HRM’. However, they did look specifically at the issue of HR as the champion of employee interests. Here the outcome was clear: ‘... there is support for the idea of *‘managing* employee contribution’; but there is no suggestion in the interviews that this is carried out in a way designed to promote employee interests’(p419). This does not present a positive picture in terms of equal opportunities for disabled workers.

the case. One study looking at the response of employers to the DDA found that whilst the DDA was a key factor in the reasons for making adjustments for disabled people, it was not the most important. The most important factor was that it was the 'right thing to do for disabled staff' (Simm et al, 2007:6). The legislation was the second most common factor, but the majority who had made adjustments reported they would have made at least some of them without the legislation. Another study that looked at the response of providers to customers in making reasonable adjustments in line with the requirements of the DDA found a similar response. Providers were driven by issues such as customer service, extending access, as well 'moral, ethical and social reasons' (Meager et al, 2002:4), with the DDA and fear of litigation seemingly low priority. In a competitive environment it is seen as morally correct to treat people fairly (Confederation of British Industry, 2008).

Equal opportunity approaches can be founded on either treating people in the same way, or by recognising their differences and treating specific groups or individuals in a particular way (Clark, 2004). Underneath this is the assumption that fair outcomes will be produced by fair procedures, but whether this is correct is doubted by some (Torrington et al, 2011). It has been argued that the advent of anti-discrimination legislation (at least around race and gender) pushed employers into focusing on just procedures as opposed to just outcomes (Thibaut and Walker, 1975). This promoted the notion that equal opportunities can be about having processes based on ensuring people were all treated the same (Jewson and Mason, 1994; Noon, 2004), but some have argued that such approaches (in regard to recruitment at least) delivers substantial inequality in regard to some groups of people. Meaningful equality of opportunity is to be secured only when 'illegitimate sources of variation have been compensated for or eliminated' (Burchardt, 2007:44). However, Burchardt does then go on to acknowledge that what can be regarded as legitimate variations that should be accepted, as opposed to what is illegitimate, depends on what perspective is taken. This would seem to be a key point: in simple terms what approach should be taken to differentiating between talent and impairment? If someone is better able to undertake a role than another person, is it down to their innate abilities (which must be respected) or due to an impairment in the other person that should be accommodated? This raises the issue of what should be held as talent. Scanning the

general media there are repeated references to the talents or otherwise of people, and typically these seem to deem talent as the capacity to do something that others cannot do regardless of the effort they put in. An example is that of Terry Wogan crisply disparaging another, now discredited, celebrity.

‘He had no talent, except for bombast and self-promotion. You kind of admired him for doing as well as he’d done, without any talent whatsoever.’  
(Sunday Times Magazine, 2013: 29)

Clearly this is an example of a populist viewpoint of talent, but it helps highlight an issue that is then central to the social model of disability. This is the extent to which how work is constructed limits the capacity of people with impairments (however they are defined) to undertake a particular role. Taking an example, that of driving a car, it seems self-evident that someone with no vision at all (at this point in time) cannot undertake the role of a driver. The only option would be to provide a driver, which is to provide a substitute to undertake the task. This contrasts to someone who had impaired mobility, who may well be able to drive perfectly adequately with a vehicle that has been designed specifically to their requirements. When seeking to drive a car only for one’s own use it is an issue of individual self-determination, but when it comes to contracted employment the issue will then involve the rights and responsibilities of the employer. In considering the issue of the difference between talent and impairment, the degree to which employers should accommodate someone will depend, it seems, in part on whether they are accommodating or substituting for impairment effects, and in part what they see as reasonable to do so when operating in a competitive environment.

Hence this returns the argument to the nature of capitalism (as the social model has often done) and to what extent should employers adapt their behaviour away from a purely market driven approach. Whether this is done on the basis of personal values, in line with popular sentiment, or in response to state requirements, it seems to ground what is expected of employers in the general perceptions and views of people around disability and employment. It is the degree to which people expect their general inclination to help and support disabled people to be translated in actual changes in environments and behaviour. It is interesting that some writers have used the term ‘accredited impairments’ (e.g. Barnes, 2000), which implies that there is a

need to bring a degree of legitimacy to what is regarded as a disability. Whilst this does not in any way solve the issue of how to determine what is then 'reasonable', this reinforces the importance of how disability is conceptualised when it comes to employer decision making.

Overall it appears that equal opportunity policies have not provided the environment that has reconciled the needs of disabled workers with that of the employers. Having failed to deliver they have fallen out of favour to some degree (Taylor, 2010), with the focus moving towards the concept of diversity. This change has been attributed to the identification that within workforces there were different social groups who made diverse but important impacts of performance, such that there was a shift away from using equal opportunity approaches to rectify social injustices within the workplace to utilising diversity to promote broader business and social outcomes (Foster and Harris, 2005).

The essential rationale for the diversity business case starts with the idea of running an organisation in a way that acknowledges the differences between people as assets (Torrington et al, 2011). Consequently benefits are gained from acknowledging these differences, benefits that are accrued through making the best use of talent, generating new opportunities for the business through a wider range of viewpoints and having the capacity to work within different cultures (Robinson and Dechant, 1997). It has been argued that managing diversity sits well with the proposition that social justice is achieved by being an excellent employer following best practice principles (Dickens, 1999; Liff, 1996). And yet repeatedly the rationale for diversity (and disability) is firmly rooted in the business case, that is, the belief that diversity brings advantage to a business (Dijk et al, 2012); for example the Employers' Forum on Disability states:

'Disability confident organisations are better employers for everyone, and make significant cost savings and productivity gains through developing more efficient recruitment, employment and customer service processes.'  
(Employers Forum on Disability, 2012)<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> It is interesting to note that the Employer's Forum on Disability relaunched itself as the Business Disability Forum in 2012. Whilst the current website emphasises the benefits of being 'disability smart' the previous approach of citing supporting evidence seems to have been dispensed with.

The drivers for the diversity business case such as improving effectiveness, impact on profitability and bringing out the potential in employees can be contrasted to those claimed for the equal opportunities approach of concerns for individual rights, avoiding discrimination, ensuring legal requirements are met and regarding difference as something to be avoided or as a burden to the organisation (Maxwell et al, 2000). Diversity is seen 'as embracing the rich tapestry of skills, experience and ideas that come from the varying backgrounds that society offers today' (Bagshaw, 2004:154), offering an approach which is more relevant to the flexible roles that are a feature of modern working (Iles et al, 1998). Employers who project themselves as offering an inclusive organisation by seeking applications from a wide and diverse set of people can present themselves as an employer of choice, thus boosting their capacity to draw in the best applicants (Cox and Blake, 1991 cited in Foster Harris, 05). The business case for diversity is further buttressed by claims that it can reduce costs (as failing to deal with discrimination can be costly), improve marketing due to a greater understanding of the customer needs, improved creativity by bringing together diverse ideas, and a greater capacity to retain talent (Bagshaw, 2004).

When presented in this manner, the case for diversity can be seen to support the aspirations of disabled people, who could argue that, if they are the most skilled and talented, then they would be recruited regardless of their impairments. Conversely it could be seen as simply intensifying the competition for jobs when disabled people are already starting from a position of disadvantage. However, the business case for diversity is 'presented as unassailable' (Bajawa and Woodall, 2006:49), given the claims that it brings the greater return on human capital, improves access to markets (Gardenswartz and Rowe, 1998), ensures the best people are recruited and retained, stimulates innovation and creativity, and increases businesses' flexibility and resilience (Kandola and Fullerton, 1994). In principle it stimulates changes in the approach which can then offer ways of meeting individual needs more effectively (Foster and Harris, 2005). However, consideration of that principle would question its validity for at least some disabled people, especially as it has been noted that organisations have seen managing diversity as around ethnicity and gender with little focus on the specific issues that relate to disabled workers (Wooten and James, 2005).

Whilst there has been much made of the business case, when the business case for diversity has been examined, little or no evidence was found for it (Anderson and Mecalfe, 2003), or indeed that there is little clarity over how diversity is to be defined (Harvey, 2005). The idea that employers in the UK are actually switching from equal opportunities approaches to diversity management is difficult to demonstrate (Bajawa and Woodall, 2006). Indeed it is claimed that in many organisations diversity is 'light years away' (Holbeche, 2005:395), whilst diversity training is not highlighted as a priority by managers (Foster and Harris, 2005). The evidence to support the economic arguments that diversity will make organisations more competitive seems contradictory, in that there is some supporting evidence of increased profitability, but also evidence of detrimental impacts on internal processes within organisations (Bajawa and Woodall, 2006). It is argued that proposals around increasing diversity should be considered in the same light as any other investment proposals on which there should be a return (Robinson and Dechant, 1997), but the evidence to support the argument that diversity provides competitive advantage is seen as thin, based on generalisations drawn from research into small teams, without taking into account the potential problems faced in making diversity management an achievable approach in the UK (Hicks-Clarke and Iles, 2000). However this has done little to dampen enthusiasm within some quarters for diversity management.

'Diversity is celebrated with the help of evocative metaphors such as the melting pot, the patchwork quilt, the multi-colored or cultural mosaic, and the rainbow. All of these metaphors evoke enormously affirmative connotations of diversity, associating it with images of cultural hybridity, harmonious coexistence, and colorful heterogeneity. (Prasad and Mills, 1997:4)

A key issue here, which was alluded to earlier, is how well the specific issues in relation to disability are considered within diversity management? Some of the texts on diversity show little appreciation of this issue. For example, in discussing diversity Bentley and Clayton (1998) confidently claim that it is not equality of opportunity that people seek, rather opportunities that match both what they want for themselves, and their personal attributes, which by definition will differ from person to person. However, with regard to disability, their argument appears weak, given that in their book on diversity they manage to avoid mentioning disability once. This is not



uncommon: some texts on diversity play little or no attention to disability (Thomas and Ely, 2005; Robinson and Dechant, 1997). Other texts do make more mention of disability, but it often feels that the issues relating to disability are rather drowned in the overall focus on gender and ethnicity.

Alongside the many positive claims for diversity management, there are also criticisms. Given that diversity management is intended to improve how an organisation operates, it can be a challenge to realise this if there is a clash between what is required to manage diversity and what is required to achieve efficiency within the organisation (Kersten, 2000). It may be that the business case is contingent on the more immediate demands on a business and the desire to comply with anti-discrimination laws (Docherty, 2004, Bajawa and Woodall, 2006). Whilst diversity is mostly put forward as something that serves the interests of all elements of the workforce, underneath it can provoke major conflict, unhappiness and resentment (Dick and Cassell, 2002). It is argued that diversity management can be seen from a negative perspective, in that the resistance to diversity within organisations is not properly acknowledged or dealt with, and proof that diversity initiatives actually work is lacking (Prasad and Mills, 1997). Whilst this has been related mainly to issues of race, if disability is to be a strand within diversity, then this challenge is the same. People tend to agree on the principles of diversity, but see implementation as difficult, and see it as contradictory in how it is applied (Foster and Harris, 2005).

There is now scepticism over the potential of diversity, including its usefulness in aiding non-heterogeneous groups such as disabled people, the limited available evidence and suggestions that much of literature on the subject is 'atheoretical' (Dick and Cassell, 2002:954). Perhaps more cynically, without a widely agreed definition of diversity management employers can formulate it in a way that meets what they are seeking to achieve in general, the inherent vagueness around diversity allowing those people implementing it to be driven by what is most useful organisationally (Foster and Harris, 2005). This may reflect a more general point that organisations in the main only take on people-related issues (such as equality and diversity) when it necessary to do so (Holbeche, 2005). The drive to encompass all differences can result in such a generalised approach that the overall aims and objectives lose any useful meaning (Kumra and Manfredi, 2012).

Diversity can be seen as another issue that organisations need to take on, but without it really resulting in any significant alteration in how they operate (Liff ,2000). Indeed it has been claimed that diversity can be used to justify inequality (Adams 2010), or at least seeing inequality as no longer needing to be viewed as a problem (Docherty 2004). The business case is seen as ideologically in line with the New Right focus on the individual and business efficiency, as well as offering a way of encouraging organisations to take positive steps around diversity when there is not strong legislation in place (Dickens 1999). It was been pointed out that a business case approach around diversity is favoured by employers over approaches concerned with ethical issues such as 'fairness, social justice and equal opportunities', as it is grounded in notions of competitiveness (Cox 1991, cited by Dibben et al 2002:454). Dibben et al go on to point out that there is evidence that those who support disabled workers can actually have low expectations of those they support, leading them to argue that they should be employed for moral and legal reasons. They further point out evidence that diversity approaches incentivises managers to act in pragmatic and selective ways, rather than embracing an effective equal opportunities approach.

Indeed, it has been questioned if diversity as an approach intrinsically supports equality (Kumra and Manfredi, 2012). Kirton and Green (2005) assert that generally a business case for diversity is difficult to justify in practice, and in the case of disabled people this is due to increased costs linked to individuality. For example, the most common reasons put forward to justify discrimination include an individual's physical health status, levels of sick absence, issues of health and safety and the impracticality of the necessary accommodations (Jones and Schmidt, 2004), whilst disability management itself is increasingly seen as concerned with issues such as the avoidance and the alleviation of worker injury, illness and disability (James et al, 1997). Dibben et al (2002) found evidence that cast doubt on the link between higher profitability and a comprehensive disability management policy. Overall diversity can be something that is undertaken to serve the needs of the business rather than to deliver some form of social good: the focus on the needs of the business means aspirations to equal opportunities become set aside (Holbeche, 2005).

The evidence on employer attitudes generally points to employers being suspicious of the capacity of disabled people to function as effectively as non-disabled workers. Whilst there are indicators that employers do want to accommodate disabled people in the workforce, it does appear that this sits uncomfortably with the imperatives around competitiveness and profitability. As Foster and Wass (2013) point out, whilst anti-discriminatory legislation works on the notion that an employer and their disabled workers have the same intent, that of maintaining the worker in employment, the evidence does not support this. Employers can be motivated in part by a sense of 'doing the right thing', rather than either a belief that there is no risk to competitiveness, or that they should reframe how they approach business. The record on EO does not indicate that employers have enthusiastically embraced equality, but rather have seen it as something that needs to be done, particularly in order to fend off the threats of challenge and litigation. The development of the diversity agenda does superficially seem to offer something more positive for disabled people: the idea that difference is to be valued seems a good fit with the notion that disabled people can and should be accommodated in the workplace. However, the fundamental drivers behind the idea of a diversity business case need to be questioned. The argument that individuals by their differences can add value to an organisation can be turned round, in that the implication is that difference can *only* be valued if it adds value. When it comes to disabled people, it would seem to follow then what is not valued is the difference that requires an accommodation (as that in itself does not add value), but rather what value some other element of difference might bring. Whilst the general principle of seeing difference as something of value may seem laudable, it seems to require difference to be valuable to the profitability of an organisation before it becomes desirable.

The fact that diversity is presented as a business case does suggest that there has been a fundamental value change. The old EO agenda, burdensome to business and seemingly grudgingly accepted, did push organisations towards creating more equality in the workplace, and could be recognised as an approach that required people to act to deliver a social good. It can be argued that diversity represents an advance for neo-liberalist thinking, the value of diversity is not being measured in terms of whether it is the right thing to do, but if it is the profitable approach to take. The virtue of diversity

is about improving business, not equality. Its value is in helping organisations meet the changing demands of globalised trade, not supporting disadvantaged groups to improve their lot in life. And given that there is little evidence that it does work for businesses (as opposed to the claims that it does), it does feel to be, to some degree, a smokescreen. The demonising of dependency under neo-liberalism has required an approach to equality that demands it brings returns to the business, not costs, and that everyone is to be valued as long as they are valuable to the organisation. And in a competitive labour market this would mean they are the most valuable person of those available. This seems distant from an accommodating, uncompetitive environment where the needs of disabled people can be accepted and accommodated in the way that the social model envisages.

When considering the overall approach of employers, there is a strong sense that employers espouse, with differing degrees of enthusiasm, particular approaches to disability equality in the workplace that mask a substantial degree of ambivalence. Their position, when considered in the wider context of the commercial market place, does not present as necessarily illogical. They feel compelled to be seen to be positive, or at least to not be negative, around disability, and yet hold significant concerns over the potential impact on their business if they employ disabled people. How they conceptualise disabled people in the face of what they see as conflicting demands remains central to this issue. The next section will consider in detail how employers approach some key employment issues, including productivity, sickness, accommodations and recruitment. It will also consider the issue of management support, with particular reference to co-workers.

## **Specific approaches of employers to employing disabled people**

### ***Productivity***

It seems inevitable that the issue of productivity will be a key element of any discussion of the response of employers to disability, given that it is at the heart of competitive business, with the workforce seen as the limiting factor to productivity: hence the aversion to any group that is seen as potentially less productive such as

disabled people (Russell, 2002). Indeed it is argued that globalisation has increased focus on productivity, which results in some disabled people being pushed out of the workforce. There is a general belief that there is a moral hazard that people will not work hard unless their employer keeps them under surveillance (Richette, 1994), which reinforces the general anxiety that abounds over productivity. There is a general view from employers that disabled people cannot be as productive as their non-disabled counterparts (Borsay, 1997; Basas, 2008), which is linked to the competitive nature of the working environment (Hahn, 1997; Beyer, 1999). It is cited that the functional impairments of disabled people are used as evidence that their position is unequal and non-competitive (Hahn, 1997). However, not every study has followed this line, with one study of small employers finding only a quarter of them tended to think that disabled people would be less productive (Kelly et al, 2005).

In terms of evidence of lower productivity there are examples that can be cited, such as a Canadian study that identified productivity losses over time following injuries that led to permanent partial disabilities (Butler et al, 2006). It is perhaps unsurprising, given the very heterogeneous nature of disability, that it is seen that some impairments do effect productivity, and some do not (Danermark and Gellerstedt, 2004). As Baldwin et al (1994) point out, whilst a blind person might have problems operating a crane they may have few disadvantages in being a telephone operator, reinforcing the point that simply determining who can be classed as disabled is far from straightforward. As the pace of life (including work) increases, so does the expectation of what people can undertake and this in itself can increase the disability people experience (Wendall, 2010). Given the overriding need of businesses within a capitalist system to ensure the workforce is organised to deliver the greatest productivity possible (Borsay, 2005), as well as wanting to pay the workers as low as wages as is possible (Grover and Piggott, 2005), it is not unexpected that disabled people sense from their own experiences that employers put profitability and productivity before the employee (Lock et al, 2005).

### ***Sickness***

In regard to the issue of sickness, traditionally disability has often been seen as the same as sickness, which in turn meant disabled people could be allocated to the sick role and with it be excused from expectations around productivity (Hayes and Hannold,

2007). The terms illness and disability are ones that can be used interchangeably, at least within government publications and research (Easterlow and Smith, 2003), whilst under the Disability Discrimination Act (and now the Equality Act) it is possible to regard long term illness as disability (Massie, 2010). The importance of this is that if disability and illness are conflated, then how people think about illness and work will impact on how they conceptualise disability. The amount of time off sick that is seen as acceptable is determined by what is seen as reasonable, based both on what a range of people such as employers, co-workers, doctors, family and so forth consider to be so, and also the prevailing circumstances (Pinder, 1995). From this perspective the legitimacy of an employer's stance around disability as sickness (and their consequent response) could be founded in the wider viewpoints of members of society. Certainly there are assumptions in play, such as all disabled people have health problems that will limit how productive they are in some kinds of work (Baldwin and Johnson, 1994) and disabled workers have more time off sick, despite surveys of attendance showing this to not be the case (Greenwood and Johnson, 1987)

### ***Accommodations***

When considering the approach of employers to accommodations, again the pattern is that there is a gulf between beliefs and practices. Employer concerns over accommodations tend to focus on such things as cost (Hendricks et al, 2005; Colella et al, 2004) which they believe will be high (Hernandez et al, 2009; Aston, 2005), but also on how disruptive they will be to the workplace (West and Cardy, 1997; Colella et al, 2004) and possible resentment from co-workers (Kelly et al, 2005). Whilst there is much anxiety over these issues, employers who did employ disabled people turned out to find it more positive than anticipated (Morrell, 1990; Honey et al, 1993 cited in Arthur and Zarb, 1995), with the costs of accommodations not being as high as expected (Aston, 2005), and indeed often turning out to be relatively low (Schartz et al, 2006; Hernandez et al, 2009; Younes, 2001; Colella et al, 2004). However, Chirikos (2000) argues that the evidence that the cost of accommodations is low may not reflect the full opportunity costs of a disabled person, and may ignore selection factors, in that it tends to be low cost people who get recruited. Hence the current costs of accommodations may not be a good guide to predicting of the costs of accommodating those disabled people not yet employed.

Studies have found that the majority of employers report that making adjustments was easy (Simm et al, 2007; Kelly et al, 2005), but it needs to be noted that in some instances what was provided was limited, small-scale changes (Kelly et al, 2005). Being in work increases the chances of getting an accommodation compared to those who are trying to get recruited (Schartz et al, 2006; Dewson et al, 2010), although there is also evidence that older workers are less likely to get accommodations than younger ones (Williams et al, 2006). It is held that accommodations for people with mental health problems present more of a challenge (Olsheskia et al, 2002). When it comes to the question as to whether the benefits of an accommodation are greater than the cost to the organisation, the evidence is that a majority of employers found this to be the case (Roberts et al, 2004). Goss and Goss (1998) argue, albeit based on a small sample, that accommodation costs were not as off-putting as claimed by those who had opposed more disability rights. However, this should also be balanced by the point made by Lalani et al (2011) in a study of the impact of 'fitness notes', in that the costs of adjustments was highly variable and often not calculated. Styers and Shultz (2009) identified that more complicated accommodations can be seen as less reasonable, but in fact many changes are relatively straightforward to make (Simm et al, 2007).

Common adaptations range from small scale changes in office arrangements to altering job roles (Aston et al, 2005) and physical adjustments to the workplace, workstation or work environment (Simm et al 2007). It is interesting to note that wheelchair access (so often seen as a symbol of accessible workplaces) was not the most common adaptation and tended to be the preserve of organisations that were either large or who needed to provide public access within their building (Aston et al, 2005). It is worth noting that the general impression given by such feedback is the focus on simple adjustments (which may link to a focus on fairly readily accommodated impairments), which echoes Lalani et al's (2012) finding that employers tend to be able to accommodate a limited number of adjustments. The determination of what is a reasonable accommodation is ultimately at the discretion of the employer, which can be influenced by factors such as the organisational culture, management behaviour and staff attitudes (Styers and Shultz, 2009). It is also argued that generally work roles are formulated around able-bodied workers, which suggest that disabled workers will not fit readily into the organisation's requirements (Foster

and Wass, 2013). These issues around how people and organisations respond managerially to the requirements of disabled people will be explored in further detail below.

### ***Recruitment***

Whilst some have cited evidence of clear discrimination via the recruitment process (Arthur and Zarb, 1995; Barnes, 1992; Graham et al, 1990), and that disability has been used as a way of sifting people out at the application phase (Hahn, 1997), others have seen the evidence as more mixed (Brecher et al, 2006; Dalgin and Bellini, 2008). When looking at recruitment from the perspective of the employers, a key factor is that employers mostly claim to seek the best person for the job regardless of disability (Dewson et al, 2010; Roberts et al, 2004). Large organisations are seen as offering more opportunities for disabled people (Bukowski et al, 2010), linked to the notion that they could accommodate disabled people somewhere in the organisation (Dewson et al, 2010; Aston et al, 2005). However, this confidence does come with caveats, including that some disabilities are hard to fit into certain job roles (Rolfe et al, 2006) such as certain senior posts, roles with specific working conditions and roles that were fixed (Dewson et al, 2010).

This latter point is particularly interesting as the argument has been advanced was that there is no real incentive to modify such a role for the sake of someone that the organisation had no real obligation towards (Aston et al, 2005). Watson et al (2007) make the telling point that when recruiting people it is rather assumed that everyone has some basic capabilities (able to read job adverts, able to get themselves to work, able to talk to others using speech). Given how integral these capabilities are to work, employers and policy makers barely notice them for what they are. It has also been pointed out that being able to work requires people to develop in order to become productive and hence gain the rewards that then flow from all that development (Lazonick, 1991), but employers frequently cite that disabled people do not have the requisite skills and experience they need (Domzal et al, 2008; Bjelland et al, 2010; Bruyère et al, 2004). This links to the repeatedly made point by the disability lobby that disabled people are discriminated against in the areas of education and training, thus disabling them even before they reach the entry point for employment (Oliver 1996).



There is evidence that employers have been changing their approach to recruitment, training interviewers around disability, allocating disabled applicants a guaranteed interview and raising the issue of accommodation at interview (Simm et al, 2007). However, it has been suggested by bringing in standard processes for recruitment organisations are intent on providing equal treatment for all, rather than delivering equality for disabled people (Woodhams and Corby, 2007). Whilst larger employers feel employment practices had improved, small and medium sized firms have a more mixed view, seeing difficulties around accessibility of buildings, practical problems with specific roles and concerns over how disabled people might cope with the pressures of work (Dewson et al, 2010). This issue of barriers that employers perceive around recruitment is interesting in terms of how employers can frame their rationale for their response. Some justify their fears over employing disabled people in public facing roles on the grounds of protecting the disabled person's own welfare (Rolfe et al, 2006), whilst others cited gaps in experience, skills and training, as well as anxieties over their managers' knowledge of disability issues (Bruyere et al, 2004). Whilst for some employers the issue is that they feel that disabled people lack confidence (Aston et al, 2005), it may also be that managers (Florey and Harrison, 2000) and HR staff (Styers and Shultz, 2009) are less willing to accommodate disabled people if they believe they are responsible for their own disability, for example, by misuse of alcohol.

When considering both the experience of disabled people and the responses of employers it is hard to argue with Stevens' (2002) assessment that whilst companies generally give off positive signals around recruiting disabled people their actual practice is mixed, with various concerns acting as barriers to them employing disabled people and little evidence of any drive to change the way work is organised. The evidence around schemes to support disabled people into work shows that they tend to focus on those people who are most ready for work (Clayton et al, 2011). It has also been found in regard to such support schemes that employers whose businesses are characterised by high staff turnover and high vacancy rates tend to be more positive about employing disabled workers, who they cluster in unskilled/semi-skilled roles (Aston et al, 2005). There also does seem to be a degree of dispensability over disabled employees, in that there is evidence that they are more vulnerable to losing their jobs

in times of recession (Kaye, 2010) which employers link to increasing competition for jobs (Dewson et al, 2010).

### ***Management and support***

When it comes to managing and supporting disabled workers, as was discussed earlier, the role of the manager is crucial in the experiences of disabled people. A telling piece of research into management responses to workplace adjustments identified that these were often dependent on the individual understanding, approach and goodwill of the manager who themselves often lacked effective training in this area. In some cases things worked well, but only because managers delegated sorting things out to the disabled worker, and the general conclusion was that the responses were driven not by the right of disabled workers to be in the workplace, but rather the willingness of employers to accept them, something that is seen to be further influenced by 'wider negative societal attitudes' (Foster, 2007:82).

As has been pointed out, whilst HR policies are brought in with a particular intention, what impacts on employee attitudes is how they are actually implemented, rather than how it was intended to implement them. Additionally managers can be strongly inclined to respond to everyone in the same fashion, but the evidence is that various groups within a wider workforce respond differently to different HR approaches (Kinnie et al, 2005). There is evidence that managers react more negatively to accommodation requests when they perceive the individual is in some way at fault<sup>10</sup> in regard to their disability, and conversely respond more positively if they perceive the person has a good track record in work (Florey and Harrison, 2000). Managers can have a particular type of person in mind for a specific role, which can lead to discrimination against those who do not fit into such a prototype (Taylor, 2010). Indeed the whole approach to managing diversity presents contradictions, with managers tending to say they would treat people differently, but then saying they would treat them the same, and also stating that they supported the principles of diversity and then seeing too much diversity as damaging (Foster and Harris, 2005).

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<sup>10</sup> In the study Florey and Harrison refer to 'onset controllability' (p229), testing out responses from non-disabled people to deafness in others that was either congenital or caused by playing drums too loudly: this latter causation provoked more negative reactions from the study group.

### ***Co-workers***

Another area of concern for employers around disability is that of other non-disabled staff, in that employers view co-worker attitudes as potentially a problem, and that attitudes can be seen as difficult to change (Bruyère, 2000; Bruyère et al, 2004). Schur (2005) points out that even in firms that are committed to employing disabled people negative attitudes by co-workers and supervisors can limit the ability of disabled workers to be fully accepted and become fully functioning. Schur also points out that the coworker reactions may be influential in establishing a successful accommodation for a disabled person, as many accommodations require the support and cooperation of others in a workgroup. How co-workers react will be based on how fair they see an accommodation to be (Colella, 2001).

Co-workers are also important in supporting disabled people to become socialised within the workplace (Kulkarni and Lengnick-Hall, 2011). Given that organisations tend to be more team based than before (Chan et al, 2010), and that when it comes to 'organisational citizenship behaviours' (which includes helping others) there are within organisations individuals who range from minimalists to those who will go the 'extra-mile' (Turnipseed and Rassuli, 2005), the reaction of co-workers to disabled people and accommodations would seem important. The picture is not encouraging: co-workers can be resentful (Stoddard, 2009) and discriminatory towards disabled colleagues (Sheir, et al 2009), including resenting accommodations where they perceive them as 'special treatment' (Schur, 2005). Whilst there is evidence of positive attitudes, a high degree of tolerance and acceptance was not the reality for all work places (Gewurtz and Kirsh, 2009). Indeed experimental research into the fairness perceptions of people around accommodating disabled people found that people seemed to act with a self-serving bias, perceiving accommodations as only fair when the outcomes were favourable to themselves (rather than the disabled person) (Paetzold et al, 2008). As these latter researchers state: 'Our results are therefore consistent with the notion that people are not particularly altruistic when it comes to accommodating a peer in the workplace' (Paetzold et al, 2008:33). This chimes with Burton and Kagan's (2006) rather biting observation that the willingness of people to accept disabled people (more specifically learning disabled people) is something of a romantic assumption.

Fundamental to this issue is the notion of fairness: it does appear that the more staff think an organisation is run fairly, the more responsibility they take for their performance (Kuvaas, 2008). But it has also pointed out that workers may perceive accommodations as unfair using an equity rule (Colella, 2001). In this situation workers may see an accommodation as unfair on various grounds, including that the accommodation is seen to make the disabled person's work easier or the co-workers more difficult; the accommodation is a 'perk'; or it may result in the coworker losing competitive rewards (Colella, 2001). Colella et al (2004) developed a model for co-worker responses to accommodations: central to this model is their argument that legal restraints on what information can be released over an accommodation can lead to negative inferences by co-workers about an accommodation. They set out a range of other factors that could make these inferences more positive, at both individual and organisational level. These include such things as the nature of someone's disability, and whether or not it is seen as legitimate (a point echoed elsewhere, e.g. Gerwurtz and Kirsh, 2009). This should be considered against a central theme of the social model, which is that it is down to the individual to define their disabled status (Goodley, 2004), although this may also lead to suspicions that they are in fact not disabled (Shakespeare, 2006). Other factors identified by Colella et al (2004) include co-workers' level of concern for social justice, their level of contact with disability and the perceived levels of organisational support. They also point out the importance of co-workers having an input to accommodations that affect them, (including the opportunity to bring grievances forward in relation to accommodations), as well as the general degree of job flexibility within the organisation.

It is interesting that within this approach there is a strong emphasis on co-worker involvement: there is some logic to co-workers have a voice in regard to accommodations if they are to perceive the impact as fair on them, but this does then lead to the question of what happens if the co-workers object and reject an accommodation, and whose needs should then have primacy? It has been suggested that in some circumstances harassment by co-workers might be instrumental in moving disabled people (in this case people with multiple chemical sensitivities) out of employment in order that work can continue unchanged (Gibson and Lindberg, 2007). Would giving co-workers a voice in the process be a sign of confidence in their ability

to make a constructive contribution, or is in effect a potential veto that would be unthinkable in other areas of disadvantage such as race or gender? It has been suggested that working in teams, whilst being a way of gaining competitive advantage, is also a way of managing through more subtle moral or social controls, utilising peer pressure rather than more overt direct management control (Buchanan, 2000). Such an approach, where co-workers can monitor each other in order to highlight and discipline those who threaten the performance of the group (Marchington, 2000) would seem to place significant power in the hands of co-workers.

It has been identified that supervisor and co-worker attitudes towards disabled staff reflect various influences, including stereotypical thinking about disability (disabled people are saints, needy, less capable and so forth), discomfort about being around disability (perhaps counteracted by being overly kind and helpful), strain due to communication difficulties, prejudice at a personal level, and prior contact with disabled people (Schur, 2005). Much of this ties in with the impact of similarity attraction, in that people prefer to work with people who share their social identity and hence discriminate against those who do not (Taylor, 2010). Not that all experiences are negative: Murfitt (2006, cited in Edwards et al, 2010) found evidence that working with a disabled colleague could be an overwhelmingly positive experience. Indeed, the issue of contact is seen as crucial: Daruwalla and Darcy (2005) found that contact with a disabled person was more effective in changing attitudes than simply providing information, whilst Putnam (2005) argues that in employment people's attitudes tend to be negative unless they have personal relationships with disabled people or specific related sensitivity training. Changing co-worker attitudes through education is seen as important (Edwards et al, 2010), especially as employers see the stereotypical attitudes of co-workers as a significant barrier to employing disabled people (Bruyère, 2000).

This review of some of the specific issues faced by businesses, particularly those of co-worker attitude, highlights the dilemmas faced when considering the position of disabled people in the workplace. The approach to any individual cannot be considered in isolation: any particular changes linked to an accommodation may then spark consideration of impact and fairness in regard to others in the organisation. And such

considerations will be influenced by how disability is conceptualised. Is a disabled person seen by those they work with as oppressed, their response driven by a strong sense of social justice, or are they seen as an under-performing imposition, foisted on the team as a sop to ensuring the workforce is 'equal'? The next section will conclude the literature review, bringing together the general themes that have been explored in the review.

## **Conclusion**

There seems little question that the concept of disability has changed over recent decades, the emphasis moving to recognising and, to some degree, removing the barriers that disabled people face in their everyday life. Whilst there remains much debate over how to frame this approach, the fundamental concept of a disabled person as simply a helpless and pitiable victim of their own impairments has been undermined. Nevertheless it is worth reflecting that the challenges faced by disabled people are not insubstantial. As has been noted

'... the real world that exists beyond the security of a protected environment can be hostile, lonely and hazardous territory where tolerance, patience, helpfulness and understanding are frequently in short supply.'(Henley, 2001:942)

The fact that people may have sympathy for disabled people is not necessarily any guarantee that they will be treated fairly: for example in the Netherlands there is the provision of excellent welfare services for disabled people, but overall they are seen as second class citizens who are poorly integrated into mainstream society (van Houten and Bellemakers, 2002). Whilst the individual can regard their impairment as a personal tragedy, it is at societal level that oppressive restrictions are seen to operate, generated by a society that is formed to meet the needs of those with capabilities (Finkelstein, 2001). There have been challenges to the social model, but in a thoughtful and balanced analysis Thomas (2007), whilst acknowledging that the notion that all restrictions on disabled people are caused by social barriers is over-extending matters, concludes that the social model remains of value, and that disability should be seen as oppressive. The argument remains that disabled people, as human beings, should be able to participate in everything that non-disabled people take part in, but in order to

do so they need to be entitled to things, their specific needs and differences acknowledged (Morris, 1999). Whilst health and autonomy may represent those fundamental human needs that should be met, disabled people face other added threats to their health and autonomy that need to be provided for (Doyal and Gough, 1991).

When it comes to the issue of employment there seems general agreement that the aspiration of disabled people to work is a legitimate one, but there are opposing views over how this should be achieved. One view, driven by social model thinking, is that what is required is a different approach to work, in that work should be constructed and undertaken such that disabled people can participate in a way that does not significantly differentiate them from non-impaired people. Whilst this might be the logical expectation of the social model it does not align with the government perspective whose underlying approach is that of workfare, reflecting the neo-liberalist ideology that sees competition between businesses as good for society (Barney and Hesterly, 2012), makes work a duty, and requires disabled people to prepare themselves to fit into work. Clearly there is some recognition of the specific needs of disabled people, in terms of the rights granted through equality legislation. There is also the provision of some specific support, not least the Access-to-Work scheme, but this is subsumed into the dominant theme of people fitting themselves into the work opportunities that are available. It is worth reflecting on the point made by Koslowski, (1994:245)

‘The moral justification of capitalism consists rather in mediating many goals and their pursuit by individuals in such a way as to preserve moral and economic freedom without a war of all against all. That which the individual and society takes to be preferred can only be reached by the market through a compromise between what the individual takes to be important and what all others take to be important. A compromise is all that can be reached when the individual pursuit of goals is allowed.’

It does seem that when it comes to the approach to disabled people the issue of compromise needs to be addressed. How should the moral sense that ‘something should be done’ be balanced against the impersonal and self-interested nature of market forces (Bickenbach et al, 1999; Lazonick, 1991).

Central to this is how employers and their managers think about this issue, as access to work clearly is via employers. It is their decision as to who is to get jobs, and hence it is their decision-making that is the base determinant in terms of making work accessible. But what is clear is that employers do indeed have ambivalent attitudes around the employment of disabled people: they acknowledge the issues involved but have significant concerns over the implications. The challenge is whether the social model can offer them a viable alternative.

The social model has provided an analysis of the barriers to employment, and a set of solutions, but these have not been reconciled to the current competitive model of labour and business. Whilst the arguments put forward for an end to discrimination and the provision of support are emphatic, they fail both to provide a complete rationale for why business and society should take them on, and to provide solutions for all disabled people. The expectations of, and reactions to, disabled people are driven by how they are conceptualised, which can be linked to many drivers, but there are two significant ones that seem relevant to employment. The first is rooted in fear and ignorance: disabled people are seen as something to be rejected and pitied, impaired people who are disabled by their own deficits. For disabled people this is the central attitudinal barrier they face, as people discriminate against them because they do not match the able-bodied norm, and whatever they can do is ignored in favour of stereotypical assumptions about what they cannot. The second is driven by concerns over capability: disabled people are seen as possessing impairments that reduce their capacity to be as productive as other people, and that this reality should be acknowledged. Whilst for some disabled people this is not the case, for others the provision of support is required to rectify the issue, demanding resources that otherwise would not be required. It is also the case that some disabled people, regardless of what is done, cannot be as productive compared to other people.

What seems clear from the evidence is that how people conceptualise disability is conflicted and contradictory, and that decision making by employers is driven by trying to reconcile competing ways of viewing disability. The two most prominent approaches to equality in the workplace are equal opportunities and diversity, and these both demonstrate the same tension. Both claim that they are concerned with the needs of



the individual, and meeting the needs of the organisation. The issue is whether these two sets of concerns can be reconciled.

Within the commercial setting the primary need of a business is the need to make profit within a competitive environment (Griseri and Seppala, 2010), and to do this managers need to ensure the workers are productive (Alvesson and Willmott, 2012) in order to maintain competitive advantage (Barney and Hesterly, 2012). Indeed it is seen that the pursuit of profit is a social responsibility for managers (Hopkins, 1997). Hence workers are there to add value, and will need to fit into the working environment. The justification for providing them with support and accommodations could be one of two options. The first is that there is a business case for doing so: in the case of equal opportunities it is mainly to ensure compliance and avoid costs and reputational damage, whilst for diversity the claim is that it will add competitive advantage. The alternative is that it is morally right to do so ('the right thing to do'). This seems generally to be done on an individual basis rather than it being linked to wider societal values. Of course both equal opportunities and diversity lay claim to promoting social justice, but the evidence does not support that this is the underlying intention of business. Rather it is the needs of the business that drive the decision making.

When the needs of the individual are considered, for the disabled worker their need is for a work role in an accommodating and supportive environment, such that they can do their job effectively. This may be that they are not stigmatised and discriminated against, it may be that they are provided with specific accommodations and support, or it may even be that they are able to work less intensively than other staff. Hence for some it will be that work has to fit to them, but for all of them they will need to be valued and supported in the work role.

Reconciling these two sets of needs in the minds of employers, managers and coworkers does not seem readily possible. Whilst there is much general acceptance of the needs of disabled people in principle, the evidence points to employers continuing to conceptualise disabled people as less capable and unable to match the productive capabilities of non-disabled people. Business is still business, and whilst there is an acceptance that they cannot simply ignore the issue of disability, the tension seems clear. For managers, who will be in the forefront of the actuality of employing disabled people, the tensions could be acute. Applying Reed's (1989) three perspectives of

management (rational, political or critical), the dilemmas seem clear. If management is to be seen as rational, designed to ensure the appropriate ends are met, the managers must ensure there are productive outputs from the staff whilst also meeting any aspirations the organisation may have in terms of employing disabled people. If management is seen as political, the managers will need to manage any conflicts that arise between staff groups, whether these involve co-worker uneasiness about accommodating disabled workers, HR staff seeking accommodations whilst maintaining productivity, or senior managers concerned about both profitability and reputation. And if management is seen from a critical perspective, controlling things in order to meet capitalist economic imperatives, then they need to do this whilst also acknowledging and responding to the rights granted to disabled people. Somehow managers are required to develop ways of thinking that can accommodate all these conflicting drivers.

The conceptualisation of disabled people by employers seems fundamental to their ambivalence over employing them. In many ways disabled workers can be seen to be experiencing what Lockwood (1996) classed as civic deficit, in that they may have rights but are unable to exercise them effectively. They could also be seen to be experiencing a power deficit, in that the requirements of employers will be a powerful barrier that they cannot overcome readily. Additionally they face the deficit of stigmatisation, being seen as less capable and worthwhile as workers. Lockwood's third characteristic of civic deficit, that of fiscal deficit, could be met in that many resources such as education, training and transport are generally available, but disabled people have significant difficulty in realising the benefits of them. Using this analysis gives an insight into the dependency of disabled people on the attitudes of others and what motivates them. It has been pointed out that HR managers might actually promote the need for equality for disabled people due to ethical or moral values, rather than on the basis of a business case which in itself may be weak (Taylor 2010).

If this is the case, this reinforces the importance of conceptualisation for the prospects of disabled workers. At the root of this could be seen three different conceptualisations (Burchardt, 2009). One is based on merit, seeing different talent levels between people as desirable, a second based on luck which is seen as unjust and

in some way to be equalised, and the third based on capability, at which point the aim is to support people to make the best of the capabilities they have. The inference of these perspectives is that how you see the variations between people (including those rooted in impairment) will motivate how you respond. But if the driver is a sense of moral duty towards disabled people (as seems to be the case for many), then it should be considered that people may hold the same moral value but take into account different things when faced with a common ethical issue, and in doing so behave differently. How they reason about a dilemma is the issue, their approach being basically teleological (Hopkins, 1997). One could argue that the social model, at least in its most insistent form, is deontological, the call to action based on a strong sense of what must be done, regardless of other consequences. Whilst this may seem overly harsh, the social model does root the problem in the nature of work, calling for a reframing of the approach to business and employment. But the motivation of others seems much more driven by some moral sense of doing the right thing, which may feel a very powerful force and yet the position of disabled people remains tenuous.

The tendency of people is to categorise groups in a way that over time can establish, within the general cultural belief system of society, that one group is less competent than another (Ridgeway, 2011), a status that seems bestowed on disabled people who are marked out as stereotypes to such an extent it is not contested within society (Young, 2010). Marginalised as a group that does not fit society's norm, the general belief becomes that the disadvantages they face are due to their difference from the norm (Adams, 2010). Indeed it follows that challenging the norm is resisted as it would disturb the inherent advantages of those within the norm. People may have a moral sense of duty towards disabled people, but their moral judgments can demonstrate dual standards, being less severe on their own actions than on the actions of others (McEwan, 2001). It should be remembered that Miller and Werner (2007) found evidence that co-workers actually did not support disabled people any more than non-disabled people in work situations. The moral intuition of people may well be that of 'fair reciprocity' (Goodin, 2002:592), and the paradox is that disabled people can be seen as incapable by some whilst perceived by others as being able to manage alongside everyone else. Indeed it may be a choice between being pitied, or to be seen intent on profiting from their disabled status (van de Ven et al, 2005), a notion that

harks back to the suspicious mindset that people adopt over those 'in need' of something. It is interesting that Griseri and Seppala (2010), when considering the general issue of equal opportunity, argue that what should underpin the idea that all people are of equal merit is that everyone can, in their own way, make a contribution to society that is of value. Whilst this offers a rationale for providing equality of opportunity, it still suffers from the issue of interpretation. What is the basis for defining valuable, and to what extent should people be accommodated and supported to make a contribution, especially if the effort involved seems disproportionate to the value then gained ?

There is no doubt that employers operate to an imperative around getting staff to work as productively as possible, and on that basis they will either see disability as a potential asset if they embrace the diversity model of employment, or as a potential burden if they not. But they are also driven by an imperative to be accommodating in order to promote equality: this could be driven by them seeing disabled people as a victim of their impairments, and hence and support and accommodations are to rectify the deficits they unfortunately have. The alternative, which admittedly there does not seem much evidence of, is that they acknowledge the social model analysis that disabled people are oppressed, and hence are driven to remove the barriers that exist within the workplace. Whilst it seems unlikely that one of these two imperatives could totally eclipse the other, it does seem clear that the imperative of productivity has primacy: for employers, the rational approach is to maximise profits (Russell 2002). Underlying this is the view that not only is business competitive, but so is labour: it is 'the best man for the job'.

From the perspective of the disabled individual, how they should be conceptualised by others presents challenges, one of which is the dilemma of difference. On the one hand disabled people (and workers) want to fit in: they want to be accepted for who they are, and for others to overcome their anxieties and preconceptions and deal with them as they deal with anyone else. On the other hand they recognise that they need to be treated differently, including the need for support and accommodations. The issue is what is the justification for this? One option is how they wished to be seen as a disabled person: do they wish to be seen as a victim of their impairments, dealt an unfair hand by life, and hence the justification for treating them differently is that it is

a morally right thing to do, stemming from the sympathy and compassion people should feel for someone so unfortunate? Or is their view that they are oppressed by the non-disabled norms within society that has been constructed without heed to them as an individual, and hence the justification is one of social justice, righting the wrongs that have been heaped on disabled people as a social group? Another option is how they wish to be seen as a disabled worker. On this basis one view could be that what is required is support to accommodate the deficits they have, in order to bring them to parity with the other staff: the justification is that this is necessary to allow them to meet the required productivity. An alternative is that by providing support they will contribute to the company by bringing additional value due to their disability and consequent experiences, skills and knowledge that brings something a non-disabled person could not offer.

This review has sought to explore the dilemmas and challenges inherent to disability and employment. In particular it has considered the ambivalence that seems apparent in the approach by employers and managers to employing disabled staff. It has also brought out the central importance of conceptualisation to the approach of employers and their managers and staff. It has highlighted two key issues, the first being the need to gain a greater understanding of this conceptualisation by such a key stakeholder group. That the way managers and staff conceptualise disability is of critical importance seems undoubted, but much of what has been found focuses on general notions that people are discriminatory, overly cautious and reluctant to offer them appropriate opportunities and accommodations. Undertaking a more detailed exploration and analysis of the ideas and attitudes of managers and staff around employment and disability would offer an opportunity to understand more deeply the way in which their conceptualisation of disability operates around employment, and how this guides their behaviour. In particular it could examine how managers and staff rationalise the competing and conflicting demands made upon them, especially in regards to the specific demands of commercial activity. Addressing this gap would offer the potential to gain a deeper insight into the mechanism involved in the exclusion of many disabled people from the workplace.

The second key issue is linked, in that it relates to the need for an analytical framework. The two dominant orientations around disability, the medical and social

models, do not necessarily offer a satisfactory analytical framework in this situation. This is not to suggest that they are anything other than powerful models, offering a wealth of insight into disability as a concept. But both models do not readily incorporate the specific issues and factors relevant to employment. The medical model offers an embodied model of disability, locating the nature of disability in impairment and the functional limitations that then result. Whilst this recognises the interactions of such limitations with the social world and the potential for compensating for these limitations, it does not engage readily with the complexity of the demands of employment and the justification for support and accommodations within a capitalist system. The social model, whilst acknowledged as not providing a fully formed theory of disability (Barnes and Mercer, 2010), does provide a challenging and influential way of conceptualising disability, although it is contested in various ways. Its focus is on analysing societal barriers, including attitudinal barriers that can be linked in part to people's dread of disability. The insights the model provides could inform an analytical framework, but for many the model is a political tool used to support the emancipatory agenda around political rights (Scullion, 2010). It also fails to engage readily with the specific requirements of employment and business, not offering a justification for the accommodation and support for disabled people within the demands of the competitive capitalist system that meets the needs of all stakeholders. An alternative approach is to consider management theory as a starting point. Clearly equal opportunity frameworks have been widely promoted and developed as approaches to achieving equality in the workplace, whilst diversity approaches are claimed to advance matters by utilising diversity to boost business (Bagshaw, 2004), but they are primarily methods to justify actions rather than tools for analysing how people think. Clearly, on a wider basis there is a vast literature on management theory, offering a whole range of approaches to analysing business and employment, but none seem focused on the specific issues relating to disability and employment.

Therefore, it follows that consideration should be given to developing an analytical framework that that can incorporate the specific issues and factors relevant to disability and employment, which could address the specific gap that seems apparent around this area of concern. The basis for such a framework would be the range of

evidence and thinking highlighted in this review, but the starting point would need to be an approach that also recognises the tensions and ambiguities. Hence, the next section is concerned with developing this conceptual framework around employment and disability, building on the findings from this review.

## Chapter three - Developing a conceptual framework

### **Introduction**

This research is concerned with the conceptualisation of disabled workers in the commercial setting. The literature review has identified that the way people think about disability and work is in many ways ambiguous if not contradictory. As will be discussed in more detail in chapter four, this research will focus on one element of the employment system, which is how managers and co-workers conceptualise disability and disabled workers, exploring the likely impact this could have on opportunity for and sustainability of employment for disabled people. As was discussed in the previous section, to support the analysis of the rich data from the study an analytical framework is required that acknowledges the complexity and tensions highlighted in the literature review, as well as the drivers behind them. This chapter will set out the basis for a specific analytical framework, which is grounded in the work of Ulrich (1994) around Critical Systems Heuristics

The starting point for this approach is to consider the process of employing disabled people from a systems perspective. It has been claimed for a considerable time that using a systems approach to analyse business is effective (Bertalanffy, 1969), and that work organisations can be seen as a form of human activity system (Waring, 1996). There has been a division of systems into hard and soft, although there are those who see hard systems as a particular form of soft systems (Stowell and Welch, 2012). Soft system approaches are held to be effective in dealing with complex problems where there are different perspectives (Checkland, 1991), making them appropriate for considering human activity systems (Wilson, 1984) in way that hard system approaches are not (Wilson, 2001). Consideration of the issues discussed previously over the tensions and variables involved would indicate that the system of employing disabled workers, however it was bounded, had the stochastic characteristics of a soft system (Daelleback, 1994; Checkland and Scoles, 1990). It is perhaps also worth noting that systems thinking can be sceptical about the value of management science:



‘What is noticeably lacking is any great feeling on the part of people who would apparently get most help from such a science that it can really help them.’ (Checkland, 1999:7)

However, soft systems approaches have been criticised for being excessively subjective, ignoring the structural characteristics of organisations, and being unable to deal well with problems where there is unequal power relationships or major conflict involved. (Zexian and Xuhui, 2010). One option is to use an emancipatory systems thinking approach. Seen as part of the third wave of systems science (following functionalist and interpretative waves), emancipatory research approaches are concerned with improving fairness, unmasking and addressing issues of domination, reforming the social order and bringing organisational benefits focused around participation and increased knowledge (Leleur, 2008). They are part of a paradigm that is concerned with how human thinking and behaviour is impacted by power relationships, and finding chances for liberation (Bowers, 2011). Such approaches resonate with the issues identified in regard to employment and disability.

### **Critical systems heuristics**

One specific approach identified within emancipatory systems thinking is critical systems heuristics (Ulrich,1994), and this will now be considered as the possible basis for developing a specific analytical framework for this study. Ulrich developed his approach in relation to social planning, his objective to make social planning rational, particularly where the planners are not necessarily the same group as those affected by the plans. He questioned how planners can claim their plans are rational if not all those who are impacted by the plans actually experience some benefit. Moreover he asked how it is possible to resolve the conflicts of interests between those in control of planning and those affected by it (as opposed to simply exerting power or engaging in deception). His concern over contemporary social planning was rooted in its reliance of systems approaches which use rationality based on deductive logic. To Ulrich this is flawed, his argument being that the underlying rationality of planning should be normative in nature, focusing on what ought to be. In taking on a normative nature, the conceptual framework for planning would then be based on issues such as value assumptions and limitations. For him the objective is to have a process that is self-reflective ‘in regard to the presuppositions flowing into one’s own judgements’

(Ulrich, 1983:20), which would reduce the risk of self-deception, as it should be assumed that any process of discovering solutions can also involve being deceived. It is argued that whilst all systems approaches claim rationality as their justification when instigating change in social systems, approaches such as Ulrich's recognises the need to deal with clashes between the separate interests of stakeholders. As the rational position of one stakeholder group may be harmful to another, this must be addressed: something soft system methodology fails to do (Mansell, 1995). In order to understand Ulrich's approach, and its potential value in developing a specific analytical framework for this research, the next section will set out in more detail his thinking around critical systems heuristics

Ulrich's approach is concerned with the philosophical underpinnings of social planning, and stems from his reading of the work of Emmanuel Kant. His use of the term 'critical systems heuristics' signals the key elements of his approach. It is to be critical, in that it will be concerned with careful judgement, in order to avoid error. It is also concerned with systems, which in Kantian terms is 'the totality of relevant conditions on which theoretical and practical judgements depend (Ulrich, 1994:21). Key to this is rejecting the idea that it is possible for someone to know the totality of the system. Instead it is inevitable that when considering designing social systems the individual will not have a comprehensive understanding, and it is necessary to reflect on this lack. In being reflective a planner is adopting a heuristic approach, which he sees as an approach based on discovery, including discovering both problem-relevant questions and knowledge, and also deception.

Ulrich provides a lengthy and densely argued justification for his approach, but his motivation is summarised by his plea for social rational planning which will produce better social systems. Ulrich stresses the practical, down-to-earth heuristic nature of his approach, emphasising that those who seek to solve problems will always face the problem of uncertainty. To him all statements are loaded with values. Hence to adopt a purely theoretical approach will fail, as rational choices cannot be found through such an approach as there will always be different or conflicting ends to consider. He sees it as necessary to accept that where there is only partial or incomplete understanding, reason cannot make this whole. That said, recognising the incomplete nature of systems is not unique to Ulrich, given that it is acknowledged by others

(Daellenbach, 1994). Instead what reason can do is help people recognise the incompleteness of their knowledge, and to fail to do this is to risk their incomplete knowledge being a source of deception rather than supporting mutual understanding or rational action. In an area where diverging viewpoints are so evident, it seems helpful to adopt an approach which accepts that 'knowledge' may be a source of deception.

The initial attractiveness of applying such an approach to the field of disability and employment is that much of the argument and conflict is linked to the underlying values adopted by the various interest groups, and yet the outcomes for disabled people are based on practical judgements. To employ someone or not, to offer specific support or not, these are decisions underpinned by practical judgements as to the suitability of an individual, the needs of work processes and so forth. Ulrich's approach is informed by Kant's differentiation between theoretical and practical reason: whilst theoretical reason is that which produces understanding of how things are, practical reason is that which produces an understanding of what ought to be. Nor is practical reason developed from theoretical reason, but is based on how people use their freedom to choose in pursuit of improved social system.

Applying this then to the issue of disability and employment, it can be acknowledged for all those involved that the issue of what ought to be done is crucial, if contested. It can also be argued that many, if not all viewpoints are based on an incomplete appreciation of the 'the system', however that is defined. The disabled person's assessment of the obvious injustice of the employment system will seem to the employer as lacking in understanding of the reality of the competitive market, whilst the disabled person can point to employers failing to consider the impact of their employment practices on the those who are excluded from work. Taking a more general perspective the social model, to a large part, is based on the assertion that the general perception of disabled people has been so flawed as to be a deception, consigning them to a social role that they have now sought to throw off. However, the social model itself is now contested, seen as a source of deception, not least the centrality to the model of disconnecting impairment and disability. At this initial stage of consideration using Ulrich's approach as the basis for developing an analytical framework appears promising.

Having stressed the dangers of failing to recognise the incompleteness of our knowledge of a system, Ulrich develops a central plank of his approach, that of boundary judgements. Whilst the concept of identifying what belongs to the system and what belongs to its environment is part of general systems approaches, Ulrich's concern is that in applying a systems concept to a social system it is necessary to make strong a priori judgements about what belongs in each element. He contends that the boundary judgements that are required will have a normative content. Hence, it is necessary, when deciding what is and is not to be considered within the system, to also consider what ought and ought not to be considered within the system. And to do so requires the involvement of the social actors linked to the system, as they should be the ones to define 'what the social reality in question is and what it ought to be' (Ulrich, 1994:247). His thinking reflects more general systems approaches that recognise people can make choices as to what they include and exclude from a system. Such choices are linked to what they believe is the purpose of a system (Daellenbach, 1994). Ulrich identified that membership of this defining group can be based on one of two claims. The first is those people who are likely to be affected by whatever is being planned, who will have to experience directly the social reality that is under consideration. The second is those who are going to put some resources into the process, such as material resources, planning expertise, political authority or other forms of resource. The key issue is that consequently this latter group will be involved in the planning process itself. He summarises this diagrammatically, relating it to a notional system 'S'.

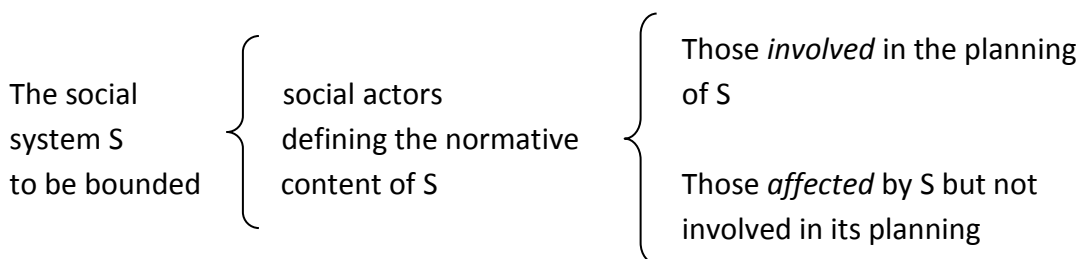
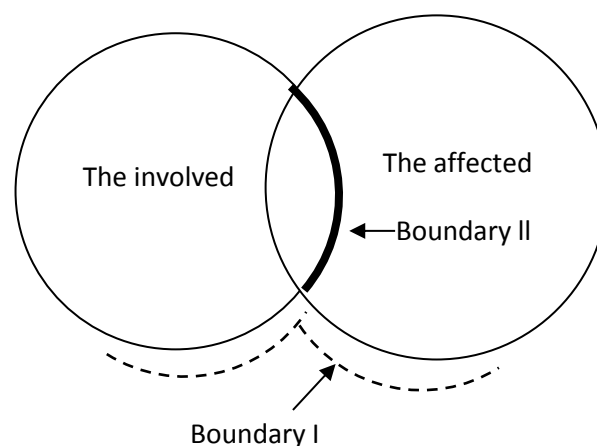


Figure 1 : Summary of those involved in the System S (Ulrich, 1994:248)

His purpose in defining these two groups of social actors then relates to the boundary judgements to be made. Whilst there is one set of judgements about what is (or should be) in the system overall, there is also a judgement about how to divide those who are involved from those who are effected. He uses a Venn-diagram to illustrate this.



*Figure 2 : Venn-diagram of boundary judgements (Ulrich, 1994:248)*

Hence Boundary I is how the system S is bounded in terms of its environment, and Boundary II bounds the affected from the involved. As can be seen from the Venn diagram Ulrich acknowledges that there can be social actors who can be seen as both involved and affected. His next step is to further define the meaning of affected and involved, and how these terms relate. In this he adopts a very broad definition of the involved as those who have some form or input, ranging from those who can put forward their concerns to those who will be making relevant decisions. Conversely he defines the affected in a narrow sense as those who are directly experiencing the social reality under consideration, and hence will be impacted personally in terms of the consequences of what is decided. In doing so he clearly indicates that the affected are those who will have no real voice in the planning process. He resists widening the scope of the affected to anyone who might have a stake in the outcome on the grounds that this could incorporate such people as experts with reputations at stake. His rationale for this is that it is essential to distinguish between those who are affected and involved, and those who are affected but not involved: to have a wider definition of the affected is to risk blurring this distinction. This is a key issue from Ulrich's perspective due to the need to understand, not only what those ideas about

how the system ought to be, but also where they come from, the 'design's normative content' (Ulrich, 1994:249). He points out that if someone is involved they can put forward their concerns in some way regardless of whether or not they are affected, whereas those who are only affected cannot do so. Hence the boundary judgement II groups all the involved together, whether they are affected or not.

It is helpful to keep in mind certain of Ulrich's key points, the first being that it is essential to understand the normative content of the process. This involves discovering what those who have an input (and those who do not) think ought to be the outcome of any planning process. The second is recognising that understanding is not complete; to assume as a planner that what is known and presented is complete is to risk deceiving oneself. Hence in terms of disability and employment, to determine that only employers are to be bounded into the system as the 'involved' would give their normative views sole influence on the outcome of any changes to the system. Likewise, to assume that one's understanding of the system, including the normative content, is complete would be deceptive. To do so would fail to produce a rational process of planning that seeks to address the fragmentary nature of understanding. As was explored in the literature review, stakeholders hold differing perspectives around disability and employment, which can have widely differing consequences. To assume that there can be complete understanding of the complexity of the issues involved seems untenable.

Ulrich points out that drawing up such boundary judgements is not straightforward and cannot be done readily in one go (although he implies that this is what other processes do, to their detriment). The next stage is to break down the involved and the affected into subgroups, in order to make the process manageable. He starts with the involved, and he proposes that they should be divided up on the basis of what influence they might have on process, and where that influence might come from. He identifies three such 'sources of influence' (Ulrich, 1994:249). The first is that of motivation, which categorises those people who are involved as they provide the 'necessary sense of direction and values' (Ulrich, 1994: 250). These are designated as 'client', the group whose purpose and interests are to be served through the planning process. The second is that of control, categorising those who influence the process because they have the power and means to make decisions. These are designated as

'decision maker'. The last is that of 'expertise', identifying those experts who can contribute to the process due to their skills and knowledge, whether this be professional or personal. This last group he designates as planners.<sup>11</sup>

The second group of social actors groups are those classed as the affected, which Ulrich sees as much more difficult to classify or bound. As this is a group that potentially might be affected by the outcome of a planning process (such outcomes might be unseen side-effects, social costs or some other impacts), he sees it as unhelpful to try to put them into sub-groups. Taking the subject of this research, employment and disability, even if the system was bounded to a single business and their specific approach, any changes could affect anyone, disabled or otherwise, who might then apply for a post in the organisation. Expanding this to a broad definition of the system of employing disabled staff within the commercial sector, and the scope of those potential affected becomes clearly readily unboundable. Ulrich's solution is to recognise that what is central to the role of the affected is their experiences and how they are affected, and any rational planning process must refer at least to some of the affected. In this he sees such a group as acting as *witnesses*. In effect they represent the wider group of the affected, in that, as he puts it,

'by virtue of their own affectedness, they can bear witness to the ways in which those who cannot voice their concerns may be affected – their feelings, their sufferings, their moral and political consciousness, their way of expressing dissent, their ways of *living* the social reality in question, their vision of their future.' Ulrich, 1983:252).

This completes the schema, as he presents it in fig 3 (overleaf).

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<sup>11</sup> It is somewhat confusing that Ulrich, having talked generally about planning processes and planners at this point introduces a specific role of planner, who in many ways does not seem to meet the criteria of a planner overseeing a whole planning process. His point appears to be that those with expertise will have a role in providing ideas about how a system is or ought to be planned, that is, how it runs or ought to run. This seems very different to the role of an individual/group charged with setting up an inquiry process in order that, as Ulrich puts it, problems can be 'discovered, unfolded and defined by someone who is prepared to consider them as problems' (Ulrich 1983:22). Given that this specific research is not concerned with a formally constituted planning process, the use of the term 'planner' as defined by Ulrich as a person with expertise who contributes in some way to the planning process will be retained. Later he further clarifies his terminology.

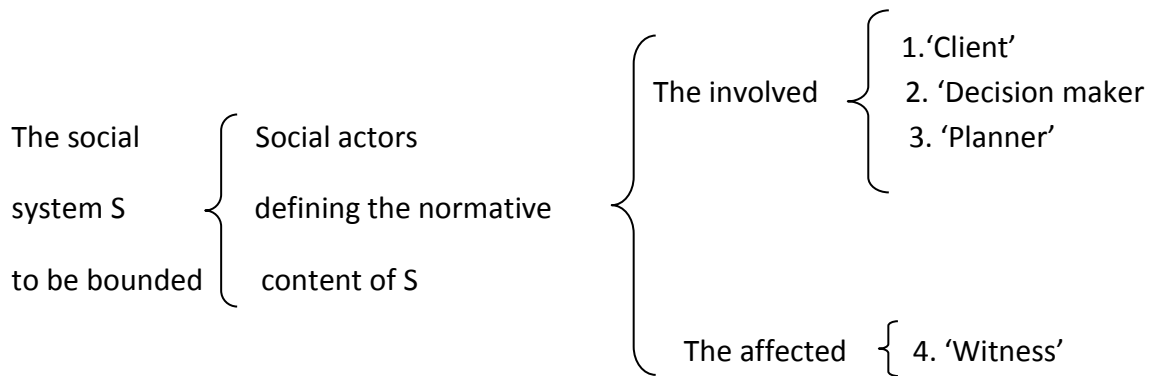


Figure 3 : Complete schema of the those involved in the system S (Ulrich, 1994:252)

Thus far the process has been concerned mostly with who should have input to the process. The next stage is concerned with the inputs that are required from each of the four groups. This requires two further questions to be answered, which he designates as the ‘what’ and the ‘so what’ questions (Ulrich, 1994:253). The ‘what’ question is, perhaps not unsurprisingly, focused on asking what are the concerns which each of the groups wants to put into the process, and what those leading the planning process need to hear. The ‘so what’ question is focused on the issue of what are the decisive points of issue in terms of deciding the required boundary judgements. More specifically, have those engaged in the process made a priori judgements about what is (should be) considered in regard to the system that they may not wish to make clear, or indeed may not be capable of doing so? Ulrich’s point is that whilst people may present what they want to be considered as part of the process, they could have made judgements about what they think ought to be considered (or not considered) that they have not shared or recognised, so undermining the rational nature of the process. Hence the need to ask the ‘so what’ question of the various groups.<sup>12</sup> This can be made clearer by considering what these questions can be in terms of the four groups.

<sup>12</sup> Ulrich (1994:253) designates this as the ‘crux’. He does not provide a specific definition at this point of ‘crux’, but his subsequent usage is in line with the dictionary definition of ‘decisive point of issue’ (Oxford Dictionary 1982), and the term crux will be used throughout on this basis.



For the client<sup>13</sup> the 'what' question is about him putting forward his purpose, that is what he would see as an improvement, based on what he would choose given his own values and interests. But in terms of 'so what', the challenge is that the client is unlikely to be a uniform group of people knit together by an agreed and well defined purpose. They may well have a number of purposes, which in themselves could conflict with each other in a way that means they cannot simply be prioritised. The client will need (or at least want) to trade-off these various purposes in a way that reflects what they fundamentally want in ways of improvement. The crux of the issue is to understand what principle they use to make this trade-off.

In terms of the decision makers, they are the people who are able to deliver and manage those changes that are sought in the system, whatever they may be. Given that the changes will need to meet the purpose of the client, who will be the decision makers depends on what processes or resources will be involved in meeting this purpose and who has control over them. Ulrich, in line with general systems theory, identifies that these will be components of the system which the decision makers will have control over, as opposed to the components of the environment which they will not have such control over. Hence the 'what' question is answered by identifying these 'means and conditions' (Ulrich, 1983:255) that support the client's purpose. The 'so what' question is then concerned with the environment, in identifying those components (means and conditions) that are required to meet the client's purpose, but are controlled outside of the system, that is, within the environment. The crux is identifying where this control comes from, and to understand how any improvement in the system might be reliant on these sources of control. Again it is important to recognise the normative content of what is being considered. It is necessary under this approach to understand what ought to be controlled from outside the system (and hence out of the decision makers' control) in order to achieve the desired improvements in the system.

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<sup>13</sup> Ulrich from this point uses male gender throughout when referring to groups. This will be adopted for convenience, whilst recognising that assumptions should not be made about the gender of any of the members of the designated groups.

In terms of the planner, the 'what' question is about identifying what sorts of skills and knowledge is needed for understanding and improving the system, and how the experts and the decision makers should interact. Expertise is seen to be broad, encompassing anything that might be deemed relevant to the process, whether it is specific knowledge, experience or skills. Ulrich also clarifies his notion of planners: for him a planner is specifically someone who has the skills to bring together the various sources of expertise that are required.<sup>14</sup> The 'so what' question is concerned with the notion that it is not certain that what is regarded as expertise will actually deliver the desired improvement in the system. To accept expertise uncritically is to run the risk of being deceived, and hence the crux is that the planner needs to identify what the expert is relying on to guarantee that their contribution will deliver the improvement sought. Failing to do this is to run the risk that when decisions are made about how to improve the system, they will be based on deception.

Finally Ulrich sees the witnesses as representing 'the crucial source of legitimation' (Ulrich, 1983:256). Given that they are defined as having no involvement in the planning process, it follows that they contribute no resources, nor is the planning process motivated by their purpose. This latter point does seem initially difficult, in that it suggests that the aspirations of the affected are without value. However, Ulrich's argument seems based on the idea that there will be many people who have no opportunity to be involved directly in the process, and hence their purposes are not driving it forward. It is the awareness of the involved of the position of the affected that becomes critical. The affected 'remind the (involved) of their moral responsibilities for all the practical responsibilities of their planning effort' (Ulrich, 1983:256).

In making the above point Ulrich invokes a perhaps idealistic notion that within a democratic society those who have to bear the implications of a planning process

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<sup>14</sup> Whilst this provides further clarification, Ulrich's terminology can still be a source of confusion, and it is not clear why he does not simply use the term expert for this category of the involved. Ulrich is at pains to point out that a planner does not replace experts, nor should they be seen as the sole source of expertise. However, he does load onto this person/group the responsibility of tracing the sources of expertise in order to understand how they guarantee the validity of their expertise

would need to willingly agree to bear these consequences if the process is to be seen to legitimate. At this point Ulrich can be challenged over two key issues, as explored by Mansell (1995). One is that he fails to consider what would motivate the involved to be actually concerned with the aspirations of the affected (Jackson, 1985 cited in Mansell, 1995). The other is that he does not recognise that powerful groups may be unmoved by controversial issues (Ivanov, 1991 cited in Mansell, 1995). This has to be recognised as a potential factor when developing a framework grounded in Ulrich's approach, not least as it has strong resonance in the arguments brought forward by the disability movement. The disability movement has placed great store by the requirement of disabled people to take hold of the agenda themselves, as prior to this their true aspirations were ignored by those who had power over them and their lives. Likewise the movement would claim, with considerable justification, that it took many years of campaigning and bringing forward evidence of the unacceptable treatment of disabled people before enough controversy had been stoked to influence the government and other holders of power. Ulrich's own defence of this criticism is that he does not assume those with power will be moved by the concerns of the affected, only that they will seek to justify their approach is rational. The aim is not to coerce stakeholders into taking account of the affected, but to unmask their superficial claim to rationality (Flood and Ulrich, cited in Mansell, 1995). He sees it as the job of those looking to intervene in a system to promote the interests of the disadvantaged, but he is seen as ambiguous over how the powerful are to be induced to participate in this way (Mansell, 1995).

Accepting this potential weakness, it should be noted that his underlying point is that the 'what' question is focused on what concerns the witnesses represent. Central to this should be the principle that those who are affected should have the opportunity to not be treated simply as the means by which others achieve their purposes. Hence the concerns of the witnesses must be about emancipating the affected. This point illuminates a central value to Ulrich's approach. Those who hold the power to plan social systems should accept and recognise that the process of planning will affect those who have no power to influence the process, and that it is their responsibility to acknowledge this and seek to respond appropriately to this. To this end, he requires a socially rational process of planning to include 'a process of emancipatory self-

reflection on the part of the affected' (Ulrich, 1983:257), and that it is the responsibility of the planner to set this up. In making this requirement, Ulrich seems clear that not only should any process in some way engage with the concerns of the affected, but also it needs to acknowledge that the affected may lack insight into their position and will need a supportive process to assist them to understand what concerns they should have over their position.<sup>15</sup> This point has resonance with the development of thinking over disability: for a considerable time control over their lives was in the hands of experts, who believed they understood and knew what was best for them as a whole. Given the societal norms operating, many disabled people were passive, accepting their social role as relatively powerless recipients of welfare provision, however degrading and limiting this was to them as individuals. The growth of the disability movement was predicated on the notion of building self-awareness and confidence in order to emancipate themselves from the oppression they felt they were experiencing. The challenge of this can be seen in Ulrich's consideration of the 'so what' question in regard to the affected. He recognises that the concerns of the involved and the affected may conflict because they hold different world-views (*Weltanschauungen*), and hence the crux is for the planner to build a picture of these different world-views that could differ between the affected and the involved.

The previous few paragraphs have set out in some detail Ulrich's thinking in developing his approach. A number of key themes emerge from his approach, the first being his insistence that any socially rational planning process must recognise its normative nature. The second is his view that when determining what needs to be considered as part of the system there must also be reflection on what ought to be considered, hence recognising the normative nature of boundary judgements. The third is his view that it is not possible to have a complete knowledge of a system, and to fail to recognise this is to risk deception. Hence, when he seeks to categorise the key social players who need to be involved in the planning process, he is clear that they may have made a priori judgements about what should be involved. Such judgements

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<sup>15</sup> There is a risk that this is seen as patronizing to the affected. Ulrich (1994:22) is clear that his understanding of heuristics includes 'the didactic or educational task of preparing citizens, planners (sic), administrators and managers for their task of critically reflecting upon seemingly given "problems" and solutions.'

may have not been made clear and so need to be tracked so that they do not become a source of deception. Lastly, he is clear that at the root of the any socially rational process is emancipation of those who are affected by change but have no power to input to the process. In this Ulrich reflects the critical-emancipatory paradigm, perceiving power and control as pervading through all society. Hence the pursuit of liberation is to be sought, as is self-reflection on the consequences of one's own (in)actions (Bowers, 2011).

## **Developing a specific analytical framework**

Having considered Ulrich's model at some length the potential for its use around the subject under consideration, the employment of disabled people, becomes clearer. As noted at the beginning of this chapter, there are conflicting and ambiguous attitudes concerning disability and employment. These seem rooted in whose interests are seen as paramount, the organisation/employer or the disabled worker. Likewise, Ulrich's assertion that for the affected there must be emancipation, should chime with the disability movement with its claims for an end to the discrimination that is regarded as endemic but unjustified within the labour market (Barnes, 2000; Barton, 2004). However, if one wished to throw a provocative brand into the debate, one could argue that employers could equally claim that they are the affected, and should be emancipated from the restrictive straightjacket of burdensome regulation (British Chambers of Commerce, 2010), and allowed to act only on that which served the interests of their business. Whilst this strays away from the intent of Ulrich's model, it is provided as an illustration of the potential to draw up conflicting *weltanschauungen*. There will be those who would challenge the seemingly impregnable moral argument for emancipating disabled people as ignoring the harsh but necessary reality of a competitive capitalist society, and as such is indeed a source of deception and not expertise. The next section will consider how to start to use Ulrich's approach more specifically around employment and disability.

In order to use Ulrich's approach to support developing an analytical framework, the next steps are to categorise the social actors into the groups outlined above, and to start building worldviews based on their basic concerns (answering the 'what' question). The starting point will be to determine who are the affected, those who have to bear the impact of any changes. Given that the system under consideration is the employment of disabled workers, the affected are those impacted by any changes to this system, but who have no power to input into the planning process. They should also seem, at least in some way, in need of emancipation. Logically this would seem to be disabled people in general. The basis for using such a broad category comes from a number of points. Government policy is to move disabled people towards work (Lewis et al, 2003; Carpenter and Speeden, 2007), whilst the legislative framework requires accommodations to be made to support disabled people in work (Davies and Friedland, 2007). There is also at least a general acceptance from employers that there is some requirement to accommodate disabled workers (Chan et al, 2010).

Taking these points together the general picture is one where all working age disabled people can be seen as potential workers. Changes to the approach to disability and work could potentially affect any or all of them, and yet for the most part they have no active role to play in planning and developing the system. Taking this perspective it seems reasonable to categorise them as the affected. Their concern, when it comes to the system of employment, will be focused around having access to employment.<sup>16</sup> From this starting point it is possible to start to build two worldviews, one based on the general perspective of employers, and one from the perspective of disabled workers. The rationale for taking these two perspectives is that when it comes to the employment of disabled people, the employer and the disabled workers constitute the two sides on an employment contract (Cole and Kelly, 2011). Whilst other stakeholders may impact on the contractual relationship, the primary parties are the employer and

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<sup>16</sup> It can be pointed out that disabled people will have other relevant concerns, such as wage levels, terms and conditions and so forth. Undoubtedly these will be important, but they will be important to all workers. What is being argued above is that what is important to disabled people as disabled workers is their specific need to have an accommodating workplace, that is, a workplace that recognises and accommodates their needs linked to impairment.

the employee, and such that their two worldviews are central to building a relevant analytical framework.

Taking first a worldview based on employer perspectives, the social actors can be defined in general terms. The client would logically be the company, whose interests and values are defined by its requirement to function competitively against other organisations (Boxall and Purcell, 2011), and for whom any process of employing people must underpin the capacity of the company to compete (Peterson and Mannix, 2003). Hence for any employer the system of employing disabled people should serve its fundamental interest to operate as a profitable, competitive organisation in a market economy. The company's main concern thus becomes its requirement to be profitable in a competitive environment (Griffiths and Wall, 2011).

The decision maker logically would then be the management, who control the system of employment and activity within the organisation, and whose day-to-day environment contains competing tensions between the demands of competition and regulation (Mullins, 2010; Foster and Harris, 2005). Managers have to meet their legal responsibility to ensure shareholders receive returns from the business (Griseri and Seppala, 2010). Included in this is the impact of co-workers, whose response to disabled workers will be a key factor in how managers balance the competing priorities and the tensions these create (Schur, 2005; Colella et al, 2004). Hence, within the system of employing disabled workers, their source of control is the resources they use to develop a productive workforce. Lastly the planners can be equated to the HR function within the organisation, whose role is to draw on a range of expertise in order to determine the most appropriate and productive approach to employment (Schneider and Barsoux, 2003; Marchington and Wilkinson, 2008). In regard to the specific areas of disabled workers, their expertise will be in the main around developing appropriate diversity and equal opportunity approaches to meet the requirements laid on the organisation.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> It may be argued that the evidence points to many firms having an HR function that pays no heed to disability, and has no approach to equality. Whilst this may be the case, it remains that this will be their expert approach, however inadequate it may seem.

This can then be contrasted with a worldview rooted in the perspective of the disabled worker, which creates a different grouping of the social actors. The client can be seen as the disabled worker, whose interests should be served by the system of employment. Hence their purpose becomes the requirement to be employed in an enabling environment which allows or supports them to meet the demands of their job role (Roulstone, 2004; Schriener, 2001; Gleeson, 1997). The decision makers who exert control can be seen as the policy makers and legislators who control the legislative environment. From the perspective of the disabled worker it is the legislation and policy that provides them with rights and resources that protect and promote them as workers (Disability Discrimination Act, 1997; Foster, 2007). The development of legislation and guidance serves to control elements of the relationship between employed and employer, their intention to ensure that there is equality in the way people are recruited and managed (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2013; Vanhala, 2006). As such, the sources of control are the legislative and policy resources that require an equal workforce within an organisation.<sup>18</sup> The planner can then be seen as the disability theorists who have developed a model of disability that locates the issues around impairment outside of the individual and places them with the employers and the working environment that they have created (Barnes, 2000). They offer the expertise that underpins the arguments promoting the positive inclusion of disabled people in the workforce.

In allocating the above roles to the various social actors, there are both generalisations, and potential alternatives. It is not the case that there is a clear divide between the role of management and HR in terms of planning, nor could it be said that all disabled people see disability theorists as their source of expertise for their worldview. Likewise, it could be argued that within the disability lobby worldview the 'client' should be society as a whole, rather than disabled people. The approach is to allocate the roles based on broad interpretations, whilst accepting that there is more

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<sup>18</sup> It could be argued that legislators provide the means to control matters, but do not themselves directly control these resources. Rather the legislation and guidance is used by others to exert control, such as employment tribunals. At this point it will be taken that the legislators and policymakers are the decision makers, as it is their intent that drives the agenda overall.



complexity within the system than is represented through this approach. The aim is to develop an analytical framework which will support understanding themes and issues within the research area. It is recognised that it could not cover all circumstances and complexities.

Having categorised and grouped the social actors, and started building two worldviews based on their concerns, the next step is to consider the 'so what' question. This involves considering what the social actors may not be bringing forward to be considered, the decisive point at issue which Ulrich (1983:253) defines as the 'crux'. This needs to be considered in terms of each group of social actors, that is the involved (client, decision maker and planner) and affected.

For the client, the issue is that they will have a main purpose, but there may be other competing purposes they have to take into account. The decisive point at issue is to identify the principle that the client then uses when trading off these various competing purposes in order to support their main purpose. For companies, their main purpose remains their need to be competitive: hence they need to trade off their reluctance to be seen to discriminate against disabled people with their ambivalence about actually employing them due to their fear that it might be detrimental to their purpose (Neath et al, 2007; Chan et al, 2010). For disabled workers, their main purpose is to be employed in an accommodating environment: their trade off appears to be between their wish to be seen as equals within the workforce and their requirement for differential treatment, in that they may require accommodations and support that other people are not entitled to. This reflects the general issues around the dilemma of difference (Bickenbach et al, 1999).

For the decision maker, the crux lies in tracing the sources of control in the environment that impact on the system. For management, those sources of control would seem to include those created by legislators intended to regulate employment. This will include anti-discriminatory laws that create an incentive, albeit negative, to avoid discrimination (Vanhala, 2006). For the legislators, the sources of control outside of their control will be the attitudes and behaviours of managers and employers, which in turn will be shaped by the demands of the competitive environment (Ramasamy,

2010; Foster and Harris, 2005), involving hostility from other organisations (Griseri and Seppala, 2010), as well as the historical legacy of how work is conceptualised.

For the planner, the issue lies in the fact that there is no guarantee that the expertise they rely on will deliver the improvement they seek. They need to discover and understand what the basis is for claiming any expertise is effective in supporting the outcomes sought. For HR professionals, their guarantee lies in their understanding and reliance on the evidence base around HR practice. For disability this is rooted in diversity (Dick and Cassell, 2002) and equal opportunities (Hoque and Noon, 2004), which, as has been seen, is contested in terms of the impact and value for disabled workers. For disability theorists their guarantee is based on an analysis of society that identifies the problem as rooted in the design of society, rather than the impairment of the individual, although again this analysis is contested (Thomas, 2007; Shakespeare, 2006).

For the affected, the crux lies in the different world views of the involved and the affected which may conflict. It should not be assumed that the affected, that is disabled people, all fall into the category that see the viewpoint as set out by the social model. There are those within the disability movement who see some inherent disadvantage in impairment, such as Shakespeare (2006) with his notion of disability as a predicament. There are also disabled people who would subscribe to the individual tragedy model (French and Swain, 2004) that can be seen to be more aligned to worldview of the employer.

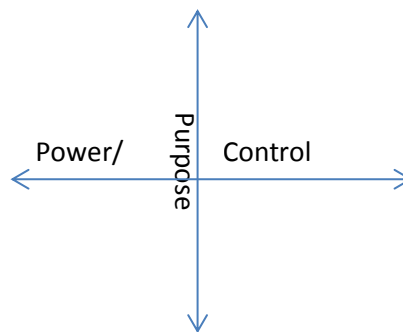
Having considered what the crux of the issue is for each group, it is possible to now draw together the two worldviews into a diagrammatic representation (Table 1). In doing so it should be acknowledged that worldviews act as a mechanism that allows someone to interpret what they observe in ways that fit their own personal views (Daellenbach, 1994). In this instance what is brought together, in summary, is what has been identified through considering the 'what' and 'so what' questions, and is shown below in Table 1. In doing so, it is recognised that these are broad interpretations, and it is not intended to represent the two worldviews as strictly delineate.

	<b>Employer world view</b>	<b>Disabled worker world view</b>
<b>Client</b>	<p>Company</p> <p><i>Purpose</i> : requirement to be profitable within a competitive environment  <i>Trade off</i> : desire not to be seen to discriminate against disabled people when reluctant to employ them</p>	<p>Disabled worker</p> <p><i>Purpose</i> : requirement to be employed in an accommodating environment  <i>Trade off</i> : wish to be seen as equals whilst requiring differential treatment</p>
<b>Decision maker</b>	<p>Management</p> <p><i>Control</i> : resources to develop a productive workforce  <i>Outside of control</i> : external legislation and policy</p>	<p>Legislators/ policy makers</p> <p><i>Control</i> : resources to require an equal workforce  <i>Outside of control</i> : attitude and behaviours of managers and staff</p>
<b>Planner</b>	<p>HR</p> <p><i>Skills and expertise</i> : developing diversity and equal opportunity based approaches  <i>Guarantee</i> : evidence base for equal opportunity / diversity approaches</p>	<p>Disability theorists</p> <p><i>Skills and expertise</i> : developing social model approaches  <i>Guarantee</i> : analytical basis for social model</p>
<b>Affected/ witnesses</b>	<p>Disabled people</p> <p><i>Concern</i>: to have access to employment  <i>Conflicting worldviews</i> : differing views to employers on capability and rights to supports</p>	<p>Disabled people</p> <p><i>Concern</i>: to have access to employment  <i>Conflicting worldviews</i>:_differing views on the basis of disability</p>

*Table 1 : Worldview and tension of the social actors in the employment and management of disabled workers*

Having constructed two worldviews, it is useful to now consider the approach of Lockett (2006), who used Ulrich's framework to consider policy development. Her area of research was examining a quality assurance system within a Further Education

system, and her intention was to examine how using Ulrich's method might improve the social rationality of the policy making process. She was concerned to analyse what worldviews and rationalities the various stakeholders presented, and so developed a conceptual framework that could be used to support this<sup>19</sup>. Taking the varying approaches to the issue at hand (in this case quality assurance), her approach was to use the framework to categorise them. She based her framework on two axes that intersected to create a quadrant. She designated the horizontal axis 'power /control' (Lockett, 2006:506), as this was concerned with issues of who was in control of the process under study, and whether they were located inside or outside of the stakeholder group within the organisation. The vertical axis was designated 'purpose' (Lockett, 2006:506) and was concerned with who would benefit from the process being undertaken. Hence this axis was seen as normative in nature. The two axes are shown in Fig 4.



*Fig 4 Diagrammatic representation of Purpose and Power/Control axes as outlined by Lockett (2006)*

Lockett (2006:506) identified that this approach provided 'a useful frame for analysing the different rationalities and world-views of stakeholders'. Utilising this approach offers a useful step towards establishing an analytical framework, and provides the basis for the next stage. To take this forward, the next step is to consider issues of purpose and power/control identified from the literature review. Specifically issues

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<sup>19</sup> Lockett undertook her work in South Africa, and utilised a set of questions developed by Ulrich as part of a process to bring in a new quality assurance system. She concluded that using Ulrich's approach had contributed to an improved policy outcome, but it struggled with the unequal power relations within the new democratic arrangements. However, it is her development of a rationality framework which is of interest in this section.

where there are tensions between stakeholders can be highlighted by considering their different perspectives. Three key areas will be looked at. The first will be the issue of what needs should be met in regards to disabled people in employment. The second will be how people conceptualise disabled people as workers. The third will be the tensions highlighted by the dilemma of difference, which is concerned about disabled people's expectations over how they should be seen.

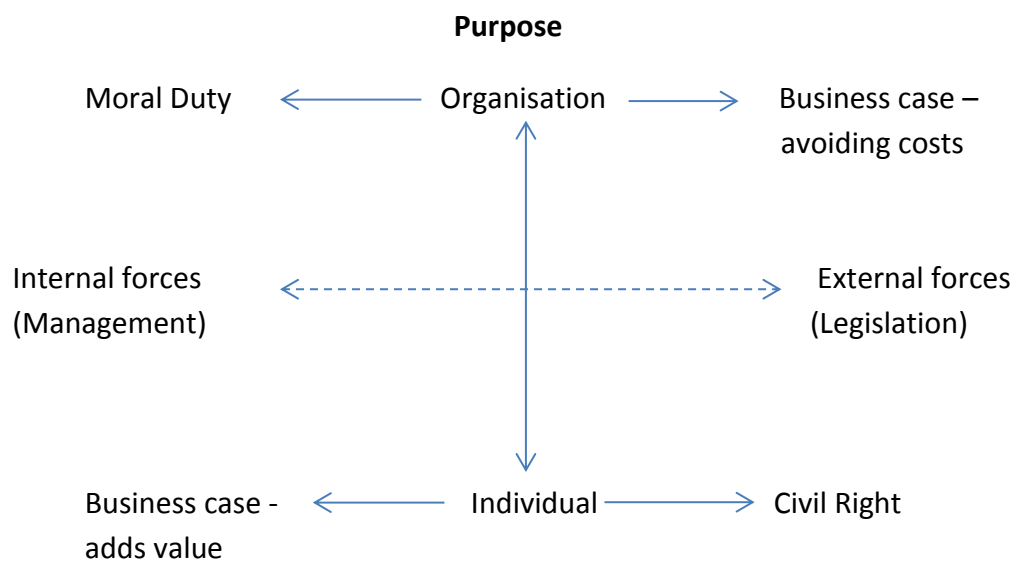
Firstly, there is the issue of what needs are to be met when employing disabled people. From the perspective of the commercial organisation, the need that is to be met is primarily the need to make profit (MacEwan, 1999; Easterlow and Smith, 2003). From this perspective, the individual (disabled or otherwise) is there to add value to the competitiveness of the organisation (Shivarudrappa et al, 2010). The individual will need to fit into the work required, and will be required to be as productive as possible (Borsay, 2005). The justification for providing specific support to a disabled worker can then be explained in different ways. It can be seen simply as a business case based on the avoidance of additional costs, by avoiding the negative implications of transgressing anti-discriminatory legislation (Smith and Bagshaw, 2004; Hoque and Noon, 2004), reflecting the equal opportunities approach. A different justification that has been cited is that it not a business issue, but rather is a moral duty, the 'right thing to do' (Simm et al, 2007; Meager et al, 2002). The individual is to be supported out of a sense that disabled individuals should be in some way supported above and beyond what might otherwise be offered.

These viewpoints can then be contrasted with perspective of the individual disabled worker. Whilst it would seem unfair to attribute the disabled worker with no awareness of the commercial imperatives of an organisation, it can be argued that from their individual perspective their need is for a supportive working environment in which they can undertake their role (Barnes, 2000) and maximise their contribution (a perspective that is probably no different to any other worker). As a disabled individual they will need their requirements to be taken into account (Foster, 2007), and to a degree their work will need to fit to them. Again the justification can be explained in two ways. Firstly as a disabled worker they will add value (Disability Business Forum, 2013), and hence supporting them is a business case, reflecting the diversity approach

to equality (Maxwell et al, 2000). The alternative is they should be accorded support as a right, reflecting the social model argument that the barriers disabled people face must be tackled as an issue of civil rights (Davis, 1997; Goodley, 2011).

In looking at the different perspectives in this way highlights different ideas as to what *purpose* is to be served. When employing a disabled person there is a tension between whether the organisational purpose or the individual purpose is to have primacy. Clearly it can be argued that these distinctions are not so clear cut, and that indeed people will claim that both purposes should be met. Whilst this may be a laudable intention, it does seem clear from the evidence that stakeholders do not generally subscribe to this.

This can be represented in terms of the Purpose axis set out by Lockett. It can be turned into a vertical axis, as presented in Fig 5.



*Fig 5: diagrammatic representation of tension between organisational and individual purpose (presented as vertical axis)*

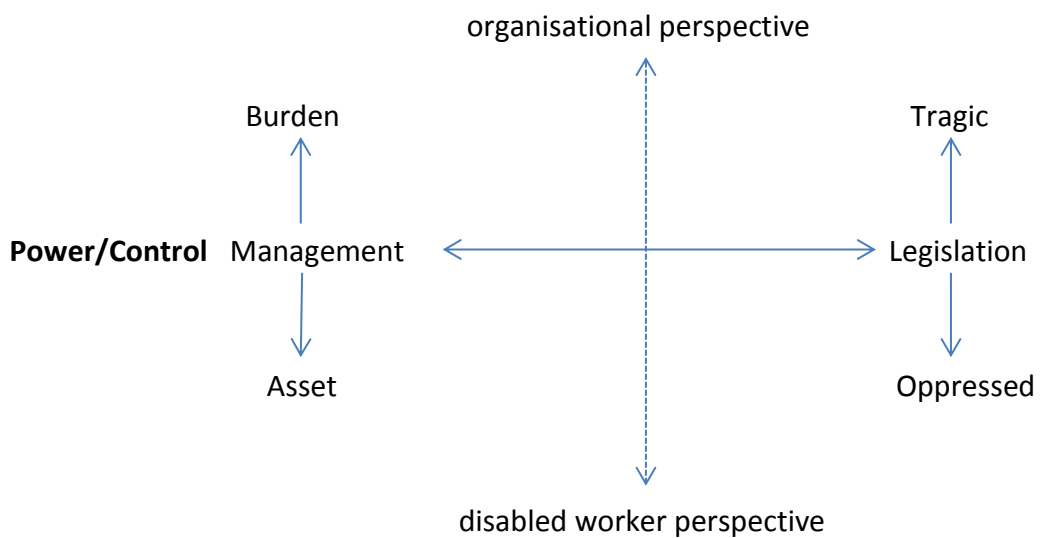
As will be noted, a horizontal axis has been added. This is based on a consideration of where the drivers for the different perspectives come from. The decision to provide support either as a moral duty, or because it seems to add value to the business would seem to be an internal force, originating from the perspectives of those running the

organisation. Clearly their perspectives may be influenced by external pressures, but the decision in these cases to offer support does appear to lie in the hands of the management. The alternative, to provide support to avoid costs or as a civil right, appears to be imposed externally. It is legal requirements that drive this perspective, and whilst managers could choose to ignore these requirements, there is the potential for legal redress and external enforcement. Hence the drivers appear externally based.

Having used the issue of how needs are met to construct a Purpose axis, the next issue to consider is how people conceptualise disabled people. This uncovers differences in how people think about how disabled people should be treated, which are rooted in how they conceptualise disabled people as workers. One viewpoint is that disabled people must work productively alongside non-disabled workers fulfilling the needs of management for productivity, and that they need to be treated in the workplace on that basis (Gewurtz et al, 2009; Kemp and Davidson, 2007; Edwards and Boxall, 2010). In doing so, there can be a positive perspective, which is that disabled people will add value to the workplace and are to be seen as an asset (Bagshaw, 2004). The alternative perspective is that they are less capable than non-disabled people, and hence will be a burden (Aston et al, 2005; Barnes and Mercer, 2005; Fraser et al, 2010). The other viewpoint is that disabled people must be accommodated in order to ensure they attain some form of equality (Butlin, 2010), fulfilling the requirements of the legislative requirements. Again two perspectives can be taken, one being that disabled people are seen as requiring this approach because they are tragic victims of their impairment (Fougeyrollas and Beaureyard, 2001), the other that they are oppressed victims of a disabling society (Hayes and Hannold, 2007; French and Swain, 2012).

In looking at these different perspectives what is being highlighted is to what ends should power and control over disabled workers be exerted: is power and control to be used to serve the imperative of productivity, or to requirement for accommodating workplace? Again there can be a spectrum of thinking, and that it can be argued that people will seek to accommodate both needs, or at least claim that they can both be accommodated. But again the evidence points to an ambivalence about disabled workers, in which the need for accommodations tends to be regarded as antagonistic to productivity and competitiveness.

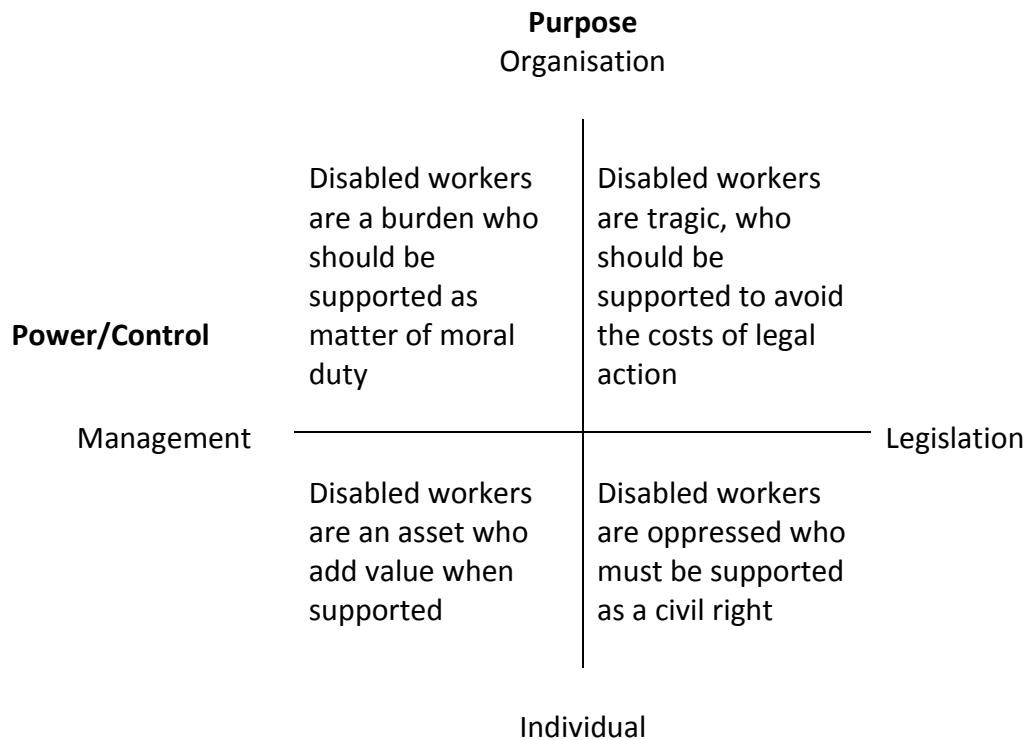
This can now be considered as a Power/Control axis, as shown in fig 6. Again another axis has been added. This is based on considering what conceptualisation of disability is underlying these perspectives. Seeing disabled workers as a burden or as tragic presents a negative view of disability. It also appears from the evidence generally how organisations regard disabled people, despite claims otherwise. Seeing disability as an asset, or as oppression, is to regard disability in a positive light (recognising that the experience of oppression is negative), and that is more likely to be the perspective of the individual worker. Clearly such conceptualisations will not be held by every organisation or disabled worker, but it seems reasonable to see them as general trends.



*Fig 6: diagrammatic representation of tension between the ends to which power/control should be exerted.*

Overlaying the two axes then bring together into an initial framework showing four different perspectives of disabled workers, as set out in Fig 7. This is presented as a standard quadrant, summarising each perspective as a single statement.





*Fig 7: different perspectives in regard to disabled workers*

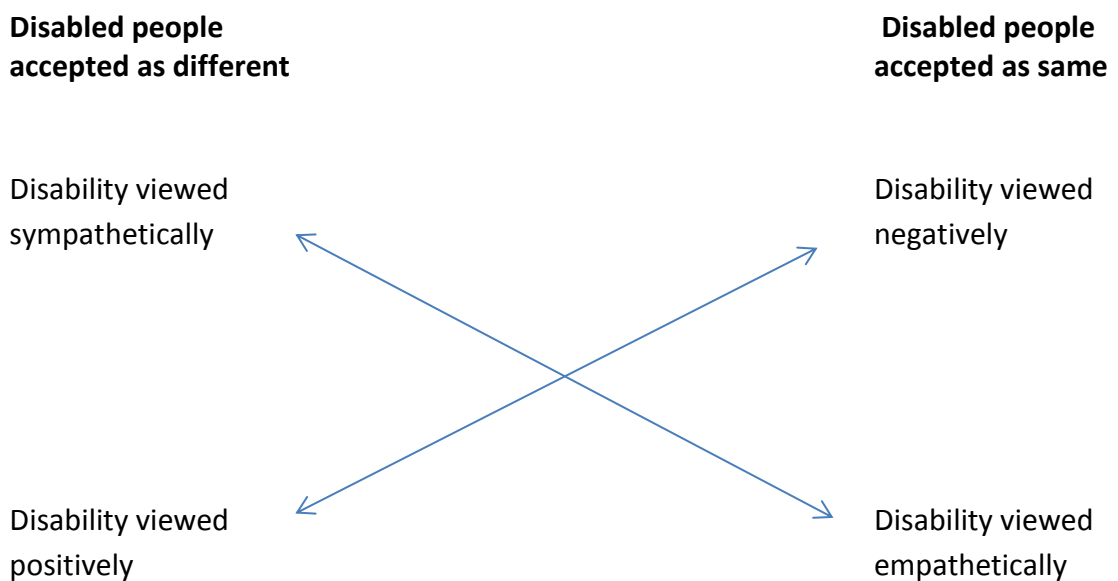
Having drawn together an initial framework, the next area to be considered is that which has been characterised as the dilemma of difference (Bickenbach et al, 2012). Inherent to this are two competing objectives, the first being that disabled people wish others to overcome their anxieties and accept them as they are. The second is that they need people to acknowledge their difference and in certain ways treat them differently. This mirrors, to some extent, the tension over power and control highlighted above, but is grounded in the expectations of disabled people of others, rather than the expectations of managers and co-workers of disabled people. But the dilemma of difference brings forward two fundamental if uncomfortable challenges. The first is to consider the justification for accepting disabled people as the same, and the second is consider the justification for offering support. Whilst superficially it can be argued that to entertain such questions is to fall directly into discriminatory attitudes, the value of these questions is that they are concerned with what should fundamentally underpin the response of people to disability.

In regard to the justification for accepting disabled people as the same as non-disabled people, the issue is that capitalism requires business to be competitive (Porter 2004), increasingly so in recent times (Taylor, 2008), and in doing so pushes labour into the same position (Alvesson and Willmott, 2012). Hence if disabled people are to be accepted as the same in terms of competitive employment, how is this be achieved when the process of selecting people for employment is meant to be a competitive, merit-based approach (Roberts et al, 2004; Dewson et al, 2010; Engineering Employers Federation, 2011)? One option is to adopt a positive viewpoint that seeks out the benefits and strengths of disability: disability is seen simply as a part of a range of abilities that can make up the workforce. Hence the individual is judged on that basis, and will be accepted in terms of the value they add. The underlying motivation is to make the workforce as effective as possible. This chimes with the notions of diversity, taking people into the workforce on the basis of what they will bring (Robinson and Dechant, 1997; Cox and Blake, 1991 cited in Foster and Harris, 2005). The alternative is then to take a negative view, accepting the deficits that disability might involve, but insisting that these cannot be an issue. Disabled people are seen as part of a range of people who should make up the workforce, the underlying motivation being to make the workforce as representative as possible. This echoes the equal opportunity approach, seeking to ensure that the process of building the workforce is done in a way that creates a representative mix (Torrington et al. 2011).

When considering the justification for support, clearly it seems self-evident that for some disabled people failing to provide support would be very detrimental if not catastrophic to their fundamental health and well-being in a way that no humane society could tolerate. However, this would be to miss two crucial points, the first being that the degree and nature of support could take many forms, which could then in turn be critical to the life experience of disabled people. But more crucially, the basis for providing support has been an issue that disabled people (or at least activists and campaigners) have long contested. One option is to see providing support as something that is morally right (Meager et al, 2002). It is grounded in a sympathetic outlook that sees impairment that something someone is unlucky to have (Burchardt, 2009). Hence the nature of support becomes welfare, provided because the person cannot be blamed for the unfortunate position they are in. The alternative is to see

support as required due to the oppressive nature of society (Rioux and Valentine, 2006), taking an empathetic stance that acknowledges the failure of the majority able-bodied society to design and run society in an inclusive way (Pinder, 1996; Smith, 1996). Accepting that the culpability for this lies with society rather than the individual, the provision of support is a civil right to compensate for this social harm.

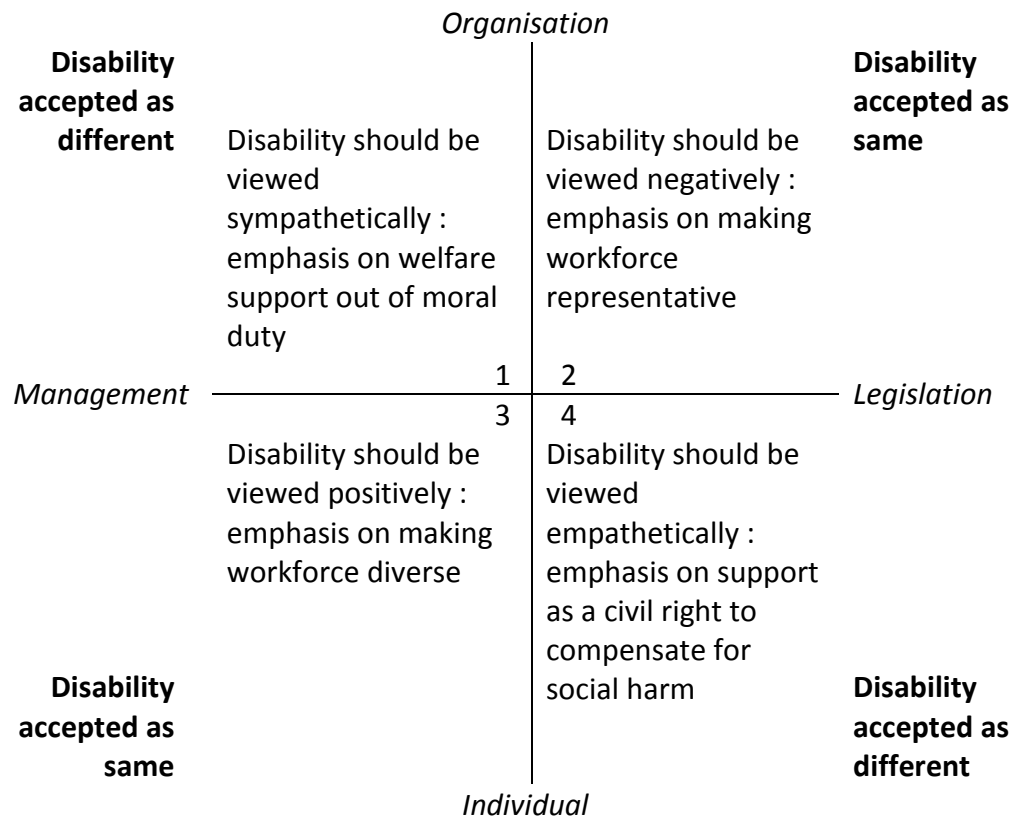
In considering these different perspectives, the issue is what expectation has primacy, the expectation to accept disabled people as the same, or as different. It should be noted that there is a difference in this area of tension compared to the previous two areas, in that this is not a tension between the demands of business and the aspirations of disabled people. Rather it is an internal tension in the debate as to how disabled people should be seen in general, and what then motivates people to take on a particular position in response to each viewpoint. It can be represented as two axes, as set out in Fig 8:



*Fig 8: diagrammatic representation of tension between expectations over how disabled people wish to be treated*

Placing the axes as shown then allows the outcomes to be set out in a quadrant format, as shown in Fig 9. As will be noted the axis labels from Fig 7 have been added. Whilst this appears logical, the justification for adopting this approach needs to be

considered in more detail. Taking each quadrant in turn as they are numbered, quadrant 1 is where the management purpose takes precedent and the control and



*Fig 9: quadratic representation of tension between expectations over how disabled people wish to be treated*

power lies internally with the management. In this situation the proposition is that disabled people are accepted as different, and a negative perspective is adopted. Generally the evidence points to disabled workers being seen as less capable and productive in the competitive environment of work. Whilst it may be accepted that disabled workers should/will be part of the workforce, support is seen as a potential burden to the organisation. Hence the approach is driven by a desire to do the ‘right thing’, given that they have a sympathetic view of disabled people as victims of the impairments.

Quadrant 2 is one where the purpose of the management remains paramount, but the response to disabled workers is driven by external factors, primarily the need to meet

the requirements of legislation. This echoes the equal opportunities approach, where there is a desire to treat people equally, in order to manage the risk to the organisation of being seen to fail to do so. Achieving a representative workforce acts as a major bulwark against this risk, but the underlying perception of disability is negative. This may seem unduly cynical, but the evidence points to a general trend for EO approaches to be ineffective, and to be adopted to protect the company rather than to promote the prospects of disabled people.

Quadrant 3 is where the purpose of the individual disabled worker takes precedence, but the power and control remains with the management. A positive view of disability resonates with the diversity approach that values the individual and what they bring to the organisation. However, it then seems contradictory to place this on the axis that sees disabled people being treated as the same. However, as has been pointed out, diversity is about valuing the added value someone brings to the company, and in that sense disabled people will be treated the same as everyone else: they will have to display that added value in order to be accepted as a member of the workforce. There is also evidence that whilst there may be acceptance of the need to provide some accommodations there is often an expectation that disabled people will work and perform in the same way as everyone else.

Quadrant 4 is where the purpose of the individual disabled worker takes precedence, and the power and control is externally placed in the legislative and policy framework. In this quadrant the legislation requires that the differences that disabled people present to be acknowledged and accommodated, in order to ensure the needs of the individual are met. Support is provided as of right, rather than as welfare, as the position of disabled people as oppressed is seen empathetically.

Overall, locating the quadrants in this way against the existing axes appears coherent. As has been stressed previously, it is not seen that there is strict demarcation between these quadrants dividing people into neat groups in how they think about disability and work. Indeed it does seem generally that people try to adopt different perspectives depending on their particular circumstance. The value of this approach is that it provides some broad outlines in considering how people conceptualise disability. Therefore, following Lockett's approach, the perspectives set out in Figs 7

and 9 can then be combined to create a single 'rationality' framework, as set out Fig 10. This also incorporates elements of the worldviews set out in Fig 4.

	<b>Company</b>		
<b>Management</b>	<p>Focus on productivity and competitiveness</p> <p>Disability seen sympathetically as a burden that threatens competitiveness</p> <p>Support provided as welfare as a moral duty</p> <p>Rationality : COMPETITIVE ; DISABILITY SEEN AS A BURDEN</p>	<p>Focus on productivity and competitiveness and equality.</p> <p>Disability seen negatively as a risk due to requirements of external legislation and policy : anti-discriminatory processes in place to support representative workforce</p> <p>Support provided to avoid costs of legal action</p> <p>Rationality : DEFENSIVE; DISABILITY SEEN AS A RISK</p>	<b>Legislation/Policy</b>
	<p>Focus on accessibility and diversity</p> <p>Disability seen positively as adding value: diversity processes in place to support equal workforce.</p> <p>Support provided as a business case to maximise added value</p> <p>Rationality : DIVERSITY ; DISABILITY SEEN AS ADDING VALUE</p>	<p>Focus on accessibility and equality.</p> <p>Disability seen empathetically as socially created oppression</p> <p>Support provided as a civil right to compensate for barriers in the workplace.</p> <p>Rationality : SUPPORTIVE ; DISABILITY SEEN AS SOCIALLY CREATED</p>	
	<b>Individual</b>		

Figure 10: Rationality Framework

In categorising this framework in terms of rationality, it is useful to consider rationality beyond its dictionary definition of being endowed with reason (Concise Oxford Dictionary, 1982). Rationality generally is explaining thinking and acting, in terms of discovering appropriate justifications for both (Schipper, 2009), a worldview that permits someone to interpret the meaning and worth of that which is around them (Rodriguez, 2012). To be rational is to seek the greatest utility: if this is not achievable, it will still remain rational if lesser utility is achieved if this is satisfactory (Weirich, 2007). The rational person acts as they have sufficient reasons to do so, where reasons are held to be those beliefs and desires which when applied to a particular action show it to be justifiable (Elster, 2008). Reasons should be grounded in assessing if there is appropriate evidence for possessing those reasons: hence it is irrational to act or believe in opposition to one's reasons, but this does not exclude the possibility of being mistaken in one's beliefs. It is not obligatory to know everything in order to be rational (Kerne, 2011).

The purpose of creating this framework is not to produce something that suddenly 'explains' disability and employment. Its potential value is that it offers a way of analysing how key actors in the support system rationalise disability within the workplace, and more crucially what may be required to bring about a shift in rationality in order to support change and development. Hence it is appropriate to consider in what ways utilising this approach could add value to the consideration of disabled people and employment. A starting point can be found in the DWP research cited earlier by Gray et al (2009) which found that in research into how to ask people about disability and their right to employment people tended to think that the answers they gave were 'cruel' or 'awful' and made them feel 'guilty'. Like those who know that it is necessary for offenders to have support and a chance to make something of their life, but would find it unbearable to have a bail hostel open next door to their home, people are skewered by their own conflicting attitudes to disability. The issues of whether to employ someone, how to treat them as an employee, how to respond to their requirements as a worker, are influenced fundamentally by the attitude held about them. This is an issue of the rationality under which individuals and organisations operate. Likewise the expectations of the employee are influenced by

their rationality. What is clear when considering the issue of disability and employment is that people operate with conflicting motives and assumptions, and there are different perspectives in play.

There have been numerous valuable studies of the experiences of disabled people, including around employment, as well as surveys and analyses of the attitudes of employers to recruiting and employing disabled staff. These have established clearly enough that this area is contested, with significant tensions between the expectations and aspirations of employers and disabled people. In developing this framework, the starting point is to acknowledge that there are conflicting drivers operating that lead people in their varying roles to act with differing rationalities. These should be uncovered and understood, in order to move to an understanding of what approach could then lead to an improved outcome for all the social actors in the system. It is recognised that there is a great power imbalance in play, with employers holding the access to employment. But it is not enough to merely describe their reluctance to employ disabled people, or even the range of reasons they might give. Rather, given the inherent tensions that emerge over this issue, the next step is to seek to understand the rationality that is operating that influences how people act. The individual perceptions and motivations of people within the system need to be examined in order to understand more clearly why they act as they do (or might do). Depending on where someone is positioned, the rationality of another person may be fair or unfair, reasonable or inexcusable, necessary or mistaken. Given the strong views evinced at times by all sides of the debate on disability, what needs to be sought is not a simple right or wrong answer, but a deeper understanding of how and why people are behaving that can acknowledge the range of issues impacting on the system and the people within it.

## **The use and application of the analytical framework**

The use of a rationality framework as developed above does appear to be a new departure in the field of disability and employment. It has been developed from the work of Ulrich, and then from Lockett's approach of using power and purpose axes to



create a rationality framework. However, it is innovative firstly in its application as an approach to the issue of disability and employment, being developed by exploring the conflicting ideas and assumptions that characterise the general debate in this area, and then bringing them together into the conceptual framework above. Secondly, Lockett used the approach to consider a discrete policy area (that of a proposed quality assurance system as part of a consultation process within a college). This framework has been developed on a broader canvas, considering not only issues of policy, but also implementation, that is how people are or might behave. It is concerned both with understanding the rationality people utilise which in turn impact on how they are behaving. Whilst clearly derived from the work of Ulrich and Lockett, it is an attempt to create a framework that can be used to both analyse and understand how people are acting within their organisational roles. It is not, therefore, simply a tool for understanding social policy, but also for analysing management behaviour, which is what it is to be used for.

Before looking at how the framework could be used directly, it is appropriate to consider its potential limitations. It has been developed from a theoretical basis, and has not been tested against a set of data. As such its validity, and hence its value as a tool for research, needs to be explored through use against research data. Clearly it contains generalisations: for example, not all managers focus on profitability to the exclusion of all else, whilst not all disabled people regard support as a civil right. Reducing how people think to four broad rationalities could be seen as crude and failing to recognise the complexity of how people think about disability and employment. The value of this approach is that it potentially allows the complexity of people's thinking to be analysed in a manageable way, but clearly care needs to be taken not to fall into over-simplification. The basis of the framework includes various assumptions that are open to challenge: for example, Ulrich was clear that his approach was based on bringing emancipation to the affected. Whilst this might well reflect the values of many, it cannot be assumed that this is universally shared, and hence the underlying assumptions within the framework need to be accepted as a source of limitation. The framework is intended to provide insights into the way people think about disability and employment: but there are clearly limits to understanding what people think. At best it could be used to understand what people express about

how they think, which may be limited, uncertain or indeed straightforwardly deceptive. Overall, it needs to be recognised that as a framework it will be imperfect, and indeed should be open to development when used to analyse data.

Whilst accepting the potential limitations of the framework, it is to be used to look at the field of disability and employment, in order to investigate how the system is currently controlled by the social actors making up the involved. The overall system is large, and it is not intended to attempt an analysis of anything more than a small element of it. As stated in the introduction, the area of study is the understanding of managers and staff towards disabled workers. They are seen as central to the employment prospects of disabled people, and it is they that have to enact the practical arrangements that may pertain to a disabled worker's accommodation within the workplace. The framework is to be used as part of the data analysis from the research, which involves a case study of managers and staff at a large manufacturing company. The approach is to explore, via interviews, their approach to disability within the workplace. In undertaking this study, the focus will not simply be on an understanding of what is currently happening and why, but also on exploring what ought to happen, and how the values of the involved would shape this. One of the strengths of using Ulrich's conceptual approach is his emphasis on understanding what may be sources of deception rather than reason. The debate around disability is often influenced by preconceptions and assumptions, and, therefore, it is likely that the actions of social actors around this issue may be driven by values that can and are readily contested by other actors, especially those who can be classed as the affected.

Having developed a conceptual framework that could be applied to the data, the next chapter sets out the methodology used for the research study undertaken.

## Chapter four – methodology

### **Introduction**

This chapter sets out the methodology used for the research. It considers first the philosophical position adopted for the research, then the methodology involved in the research. In this case the research consists of a case study of a single firm, using a sample of managers and staff. The next section outlines the data collection method, which was to use semi-structured interviews. The methods of data analysis are then detailed, and the final section considers issues of validity and reliability.

### **Philosophical position**

It is held that a researcher's research design will reflect their basic beliefs. Given this, it is necessary to understand one's own personal philosophy in order to recognise the impact it has on the research project (Collis and Hussey, 2003). Before doing this, a range of ontological and epistemological positions will be briefly considered.

Ontology is taken to be concerned with the nature of reality (Baker and Foy, 2008) and the assumptions held in regard to this (Easterby-Smith et al, 2002). An awareness of their ontological position supports researchers in understanding what they accept as real and hence that can be studied (Maylor and Blackmon, 2005). Whilst there are a range of ontological paradigms (Collis and Hussey, 2003) the tendency is to identify two opposing standpoints. One is an objectivist ontology that sees social objects as real (Maylor and Blackmon, 2005), existing independently of social actors (Bryman and Bell, 2011). The opposing position is a subjectivist ontology that considers reality as constructed by patterns of human behaviour (Maylor and Blackmon, 2005), and hence through such interaction, meaning is constructed (Crotty, 2003). Such processes of construction mean social phenomena are continually revised (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Ontology can be explored in far greater depth than this brief overview, and indeed the terminology used is not in itself standardised (for example the basic ontological division has been categorised as materialistic versus idealistic (Bisman, 2010)). However, the general thrust of the debate over ontological position is concerned with whether reality is real or concrete or subjective and constructed.

Epistemology is concerned with the nature of knowledge (Baker and Foy, 2008) and what constitutes acceptable knowledge (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Again a range of standpoints can be identified (Maylor and Blackmon, 2005), with opposing positions often cited. Positivism is seen as concerned with gathering facts about a reality that is seen as real (Silverman, 2006) in order to explain human behaviour (Bryman and Bell, 2011). In opposition to this is interpretism that seeks to understand human behaviour (Maylor and Blackman, 2005), whilst constructionism holds that as reality is socially constructed and subjective there are multiple realities (Bergmann and Luckman, 1966 cited in Bisman, 2010). Within this range of epistemological viewpoints is that of realism, that holds that there is a concrete reality (Bryman and Bell, 2011), whilst critical realism recognises that it cannot be known directly (Maylor and Blackmon, 2005). As pointed out by Easterby-Smith et al (2002: 33)

‘Critical realism makes a conscious compromise between the extreme positions: it recognises social conditions (such as class or wealth) as having real consequences whether or not they are observed by social scientists; but it also recognises that concepts are human constructions.’

Consideration of my own philosophical position requires a number of factors to be acknowledged. Firstly, by academic training I am a physical scientist, viewing reality as concrete, and familiar with the use of hypotheses and deduction. By work experience in the field of social care, I am inclined to a more constructivist perspective, rooted in the ideas that the reality that individuals experience is a construct of their sense awareness. My managerial experience has been exclusively in the public sector, and hence I have approached the commercial setting of the study from a position of relative inexperience. However, I have been concerned with aspects of management, which has some degree of commonality of my own perceptions of the role and practice of management. It is also concerned with the impact upon disabled people. I have been concerned with issues of disability both professionally and academically, and cannot claim a dispassionate perspective, as I generally side with the aspirations of the disability movement in promoting the position of disabled people within society. As such, I cannot claim that I am value-free, objective or detached from the subject matter.

Hence, my overall position is that ontologically I generally regard the world as real and concrete, but acknowledge that in regard to social sciences I tend to a more relativist

ontology. Epistemologically, I identify myself as lying more towards the anti-positivist viewpoint, particularly in regard to the interactions of individuals within society. I see human nature as generally voluntarist, although I do accept that individual actions and beliefs are open to the effects of environmental factors. Methodologically I am strongly inclined towards ideographic approaches. As such I see myself as holding a compromise position inclined towards critical realism, taking the view that reality exists, but it is not possible to capture it in full (Guba 1990, cited in Bisman 2010), and that a single reality will instead be the subject of multiple perceptions (Healy and Perry, 2000).

Whilst considering my general position, I have also taken account of recent thinking around disability and emancipatory research. It has been pointed out that whilst disabled people are subjects of research, they generally do not benefit from such research (Bury, 1996). Linking this insight to the notion that disabled people are oppressed, draws out the conclusion that research into disability should support the emancipation of disabled people. This perspective can be uncompromising, demanding that any disability research must hold fast to the cause of disability emancipation (Barnes and Mercer, 1997). Given the extent to which disabled people are disillusioned with their treatment, researchers will be seen as either on the side of the oppressed or the oppressor (Oliver, 1997). Some researchers argue on a more general basis that researchers should have lived or experienced their material in some fashion (Miller and Glassner, 2004), an approach taken up emphatically by adherents of emancipatory disability research. Moreover, it is questioned if non-disabled researchers who have not faced directly the disabling barriers within society can produce authentic research (Barnes and Mercer, 1997). This leads to the proposition that research into the lived experiences of disabled should be then under the control of disabled people in some way (Priestley, 1999), although it is recognised that it not possible to be accountable to the whole disability population (Barnes, 2006). Whilst these orientations are not universally held, they are challenging viewpoints that did influence my approach to this research. I must acknowledge that I do not regard myself as a disabled person, but I do have managerial experience of managing disabled staff. My own personal belief system includes positive beliefs around the value of employment, the benefits of competent management and the advantage of inclusive employment for disabled

people, but I must also recognise the risk that I will be influenced by my experiences in undertaking the analysis of data. I was also conscious that my own inclination lies towards qualitative approaches (see below), and that such approaches are open to criticism of selectivity. The argument is that in the pursuit of understanding of others' viewpoints researchers can be less willing to engage with viewpoints of those they have less sympathy with (Hammersley, 2008). Hammersley goes on to point out exploring someone else's rationality does not require accepting that their beliefs or actions are necessarily valid or legitimate. I see this as a key point, especially given the highly charged nature of the debate around disability, and my overall approach to the many potential risks in undertaking this approach was to have a clear and on-going recognition and acceptance of the immediacy of these risks, and to adopt a reflective approach that questioned at all points the potential for such influences to impact on the research and analysis. It is also worth noting a trenchant proponent of emancipatory disability research has identified that the key issue is that research should be into able-bodied society, rather than the experiences of disabled people (Oliver, 2006). Whilst I do not meet all the requirements set down by some to undertake emancipatory research, and do not hold an uncritical stance on the social model, I am clear that my research is focused on potential barriers faced by disabled workers that may be grounded in the attitudes of non-disabled people. Overall, I am satisfied that my research position in regard to disability is valid.

## **Methodology**

As stated in the introduction the purpose of this research is to gain understanding of the attitudes and understanding of managers and staff in regard to issue of employing and supporting disabled people within the workplace. The purpose of gaining insight into this area of interest is the potential to offer useful understanding that could be more widely applied to developing the support system for disabled people around employment. As outlined above, my personal stance tends towards critical realism including a personal preference for qualitative research methodology. However, the appropriateness of using qualitative methodology should be assessed alongside the use of quantitative approaches, as the choice of research methods is dependent on

what the researcher is trying to find out (Silverman, 2000). Whilst qualitative approaches focus on generating theory (Bryman, 2008), quantitative methods seek correlations (Silverman, 2000) by examining how variables relate to each other in order to then test out theories (Creswell, 2009). Whilst the development of the rationality framework provides a range of options into how the sample group might conceptualise disability, it does not represent a fully worked theory of disability and employment. However, it does represent an approach to analysing how people conceptualise disability and employment, and one objective is to evaluate the value of the framework in terms of data analysis.

It is possible to imagine approaches that would quantitatively survey people in such a way as to seek correlations linked to the quadrants set out in the rationality framework, which would not be without value. However, such an approach may not recognise that such a correlation could omit consideration of the social construction of the specific variables involved (Silverman, 2006). Given that disability is held to be constructed, and that the way people think about disability is held to influence how they behave towards disabled people, gaining data on how people construct disability and employment seems central to the study. Qualitative research focuses on the experiences of people and the meanings drawn from them (Gerson and Horowitz, 2002), developing empirical knowledge through gaining a view of the world of the researched from their perspective (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). As explored in the earlier chapters, the issue of why and how support should be provided to disabled people around employment is contested, and is intimately linked to how people perceive and conceptualise disability. The analytical framework developed from Ulrich's work on critical systems heuristics is concerned with the rationality people hold over work and disability, which may in itself contain sources of deception. Given the requirement to gather sufficient data to utilise this analytical approach, including developing sufficient understanding over the attitudes and perceptions of managers and staff, a quantitative approach does not seem appropriate. A qualitative approach that can access more detailed data on how people perceive and understand the issues being considered appears better suited to meeting the overall aim of the research.

The specific approach chosen was to undertake a case study within a single organisation, which in this case was Breadco<sup>20</sup>, a large national bakery firm. The rationale for this approach is that, when considering the system of employment and disabled people, there are various stakeholders who have a potential impact on how this system operates. In this study the focus was managers and staff.

The use of a study within a single firm was not the only option considered. Alternative approaches such as sampling small groups of staff from a number of firms, or focusing on specific role holders such as HR managers, could have been used. The primary reason for using a single firm was that it would allow a range of roles within the staffing structure to be interviewed and analysed. This could provide more detailed understanding of the interaction between differing roles and a more complete picture of the organisational issues that might come into play in how people thought about disability. It is recognised that there are limitations in the use of a case study, and these will be considered in the section on validity and reliability.

The general criteria used for selecting the study site were firstly that it was a commercial enterprise. Secondly, it should be a large enterprise able to provide a reasonable cross section of staff for interview. Lastly, it should be willing to participate within the study without preconceptions as to the outcome, and be able to respect the requirements of confidentiality necessary for the study. Breadco met all these criteria. It is a national firm with a number of bakery sites across the country, with an overall workforce of around 5000 people. Historically it is a family owned, regional bakery, offering a wide range of bakery products. In the previous decade the Board took the strategic decision to seek growth, its ambition to become the largest national bakery firm within the UK. It narrowed its product range to bread products alone, focusing on a premium end of the market. It has expanded rapidly across the country, and has invested heavily in new production plants across the country. It is an industrial baker, utilising large, highly mechanised production lines, as well as its own distribution fleet. It prides itself on being a good employer, and celebrates its long family history within the firm. It agreed to the terms of the study, the only requirement being that a

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<sup>20</sup> Breadco is a pseudonym



management report could be provided outlining key findings that may be of value to the firm in developing its own approach to managing disability.<sup>21</sup>

## Data collection

In regard to the method of data collection, the aim was to gain insight into the attitudes and understanding of people. A range of potential qualitative methods are available, and it is appropriate to choose a particular approach by comparing it others, rather than simply considering its positive characteristics (Silverman, 2006). Observational approaches, that is observing directly the interaction of managers and staff with disabled colleagues, could have been pursued. Setting aside the considerable practical challenges involved in such an exercise, this approach may have provided evidence of observable behaviour, but the attitudes and perceptions of people would at best been inferred from the observations. Taylor and Bogden (1998) assert that participant observation leads to the deepest understanding, in that it involves both directly observing and listening to what is done and said in a particular situation. Whilst recognising the weight of this argument, it could be questioned if observation alone would provide detailed data in terms of people's underlying conceptualisations of disability. Additionally it may have been limited only to subjects interacting with disabled staff, whereas one of the key assertions of disability theory is that, due to the disabling attitudes of managers and staff, disabled people are excluded disproportionately from the workplace. This approach would not touch on a significant group of managers and staff, which are those not working with disabled people for whatever reason. Likewise seeking insights through analysis of policy documents, company reports and other textual resources was not seen as the most appropriate approach, as this may have accessed the organisational position, but would not have provided the level and nature of data required to gain an insight into the rationality of managers and staff.

Interviews as a method offer an approach that can be used to access values and attitudes that individuals hold (Byrne, 2004), as well as insight into both their lived

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<sup>21</sup> Ultimately Breadco did not take up this offer

experiences (Jacob and Furgerson, 2012) and how they interpret their world (Milena et al, 2009). As rich source of data for analysis (Mikèné et al, 2008) interviews can provide a way of contextualising the behaviour of people, providing insight to their actions (Seidman, 1998). Given the purpose of the study, interviewing offers an appropriate approach to data collection, but the limitations of an interview-based approach need to be acknowledged. The data gathered is indirect, filtered by the interviewees (Creswell, 2009), representing what the individual has chosen to offer as their thoughts, which may reflect how they seek to be seen, or what they think is wanted (Silverman, 2006). Additionally interviewees can fall back onto familiar narratives rather than offering reflections of their internal thinking (Miller and Glasner, 2004). There are those who offer a radical critique of interviews, to the point where it is argued that they are not able to offer anything that can represent reality. In regard to such criticism I agree with Hammersley (2008) who, whilst unconvinced by the radical critique, did concede it created the requirement to think carefully about how data is utilised whilst avoiding assumptions. Overall, this was my general approach, and whilst I am of the view that the use of interviews was a valid method for the research area, I also recognise the limitations and risks such methods bring.

The interview method used was one of a semi-structured interview, consisting of a number of open-ended questions covering a range of issues around disability and employment. Whilst qualitative research is in general 'explorative' (Diefenbach, 2008: 877), a non-directive interview is unlikely to produce a clear picture of the interviewees perspective (Easterby-Smith et al, 2002). Semi-structured interviews are appropriate when what are sought are the views of the interviewees on specific topics, compared to unstructured interviews which can focus on the agenda of the interviewee (Arksey and Knight, 1999). In taking this approach it was recognised that interview data could be seen as either positivist or emotionalist (Silverman, 2006). Positivist data would be focused on accessing facts about the world, including beliefs about facts, feelings and motives, standards of action, past and present behaviours and conscious reasons. Emotionalist data is focused more on lived experiences and the emotions that are central to those experiences (Silverman, 2006). In using a semi-structured approach that would maintain some focus on the subject area but allow open-ended questions and the capacity to improvise (Arksey and Knight, 1999), the

intention was to capture a range of data that would provide a rich picture of the ideas and thinking of the sample group. There was a focus on flexibility to ensure that as particular themes arose interviewees were given the chance to expand and explore them. However, it was assumed that many, if not most, people would have limited experience of disability in the workplace. As such, they would need some structure to the interview to support them in providing data, and to ensure that generally the width of issues that were of interest were covered. It turned out that the assumption that many interviewees would have little direct experience of disability within the workplace was correct.

Interviews are seen as dependent upon who interviewees are talking to (Miller and Glassner, 2004), and I was conscious of this in how I presented myself, and the need to approach this as an academic researcher (Davies, 2007). My approach was to seek to be non-threatening and non-judgemental, assuring people at the start that I was not seeking any particular viewpoints, there were no 'right' or 'wrong' answers, and I was generally just interested in their ideas. I also sought informal feedback at the end of interviews as to how people felt about the interview and if it had matched their expectations. Many people commented that they had found it challenging and or enjoyable, and it had led them to think about issues they had not really considered before. I took this as evidence that people had worked within the interviews to offer their viewpoints. There were no overtly critical comments, but I recognise that this does not necessarily reflect universal satisfaction. However, feedback from the HR Department at Breadco identified only one person (unidentified to me) who expressed concerns that there were negative motives behind the research, but they did not seek to withdraw their interview.

The approach to identifying people for interview was to select a vertical slice of staff from within the firm. The rationale for this was that this would provide a cross-section of interviewees with a range of roles within the organisation. The firm had a number of sites nationally. The site chosen contained both the national headquarters and the local bakery site (they are physically located on the same site). This was the most practical approach to making the widest range of staff available for interview.

The selection of staff was undertaken in conjunction with the HR Department at Breadco. A structure chart was provided by the firm, and this allowed for a management line to be tracked from senior management to front line staff within the bakery. This also allowed the identification of key staff in support roles such as Human Resources and Finance. Staff were generally identified for interview by myself. The exceptions were the shift hands in the bakery and the transport depot, which were selected by the local managers. They were asked to select staff at random, but it is not possible to determine what criteria managers used in reality, but there was no evidence from within the interviews that people had been selected using specific management criteria. Staff were provided with a written overview of the research exercise in advance: within this it was stressed that they were being asked to take part voluntarily, and could decline to be interviewed. This was repeated at the start of the interviews, and they were asked to sign an acceptance sheet. In adopting this approach it was felt that all reasonable requirements for consent had been met (Creswell 2009). In the event I was only made aware of two staff who declined to participate, and all interviewees signed the acceptance sheets.

The interviews were organised by the HR Department, and were held on site. The HR Department took a conscious decision to not brief managers and staff beyond the overview information provided in advance. Their explanation for this approach was that they did not want to be seen to influence what people might say in the interview, particularly in regard to leading people to pre-arranged ideas or answers. This approach was accepted as appropriate for the exercise. The lack of additional briefing was commented on by a small number of senior managers who were used to being fully briefed on external meetings. However, the interviews throughout were characterised by willingness to be interviewed, and a positive approach to the exercise. The aim was to get a full vertical slice: in the end this proved not to be possible, as the firm were not willing to allow members of the Board<sup>22</sup> to be interviewed. The slice was therefore from Managing Director to Shift Hand. Table 2

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<sup>22</sup> Breadco has a Board consisting of family members, other non-executives and senior executives. Breadco was not willing for family members and non-executives to be interviewed. The senior executive officers also constitute an Operational Board. For reasons of brevity all other references to the Board refer to this Operational Board.

summarises the number of interviews undertaken by main staff group. A structure chart is contained in appendix 1.

Staff group	Number of interviews
Operational board	6
Middle managers	8
HR staff	4
Frontline managers	6
Frontline staff	12
Total	36

*Table 2 : Number of interviews held within each staff group*

Thirty six interviews were undertaken. Interviewees were guaranteed full confidentiality, and that nothing they said would be directly conveyed to the firm. The interviews took place face-to-face within office facilities at the site. The interviews were recorded, and interviewees were informed that they would be transcribed for research purposes.

The interview structure is in appendix 2. In constructing the interview questions it was recognised that open questions were required that avoided manipulating the interviewees to respond in particular ways, or imposing ideas on their experiences (Seidman 1998). The questions were constructed around a number of areas of interest:

*Identifying personal perceptions/knowledge of disability and impairment, including perceptions of tragedy/social models of disability, and where people place the locus of accountability for disability*

*Locating perceptions of the impact of impairment and disability around employability, including exploring attitudes to the reality of employing disabled people within their own sphere linked to perceptions of responsibility*

*Exploring attitudes to the principles of additional support to enable disabled people to participate in the work place. Locating the role of the company and the state in welfare support. Exploring concepts of reasonableness in relation to workplace accommodations, including the exploration of management dilemmas to test perceptions of what constitutes reasonable organisational responses to challenges around employing disabled people.*

*Exploring personal concepts of rights relating to employment, linked to concepts of welfare support. Exploring personal concepts of nature of rights.*

In addition a number of scenarios were put to the interviewees, asking them how they thought a particular situation should be responded to. The use of these scenarios was to focus interviewees on the practicalities of workplace arrangements, including testing out their perceptions of reasonableness against more concrete challenges. It was recognised that some people would be able to relate to specific experiences, whilst for others it would remain an exercise in imagining how they would respond. It was also recognised that there may be differences between how people might generally view the idea of accommodations within the workplace, and how they then might approach more specific examples, but this was seen as an important issue that should be explored.

It was not required that interviewees have any specific knowledge or experience of disability within their personal lives or work experience. Interviewees were not asked to disclose any such experience, and it was stressed to them that a lack of experience was not an impediment. Underpinning this approach was the intention to explore the perceptions and motivations of people, in order to understand the rationality under which they did, or would operate in relation to disabled people within the workforce. Breadco did not have any stated position over disability which staff could refer to, and the interview process intentionally sought to explore with people what they thought about the issues covered, even when they disclosed that they had not specifically considered such issues previously.

In setting up the data collection method, consideration was given to ethical issues. The research was passed by the relevant ethics committee within the supervising university. In designing the research consideration was given to four key ethical issues, those of harm, consent, privacy and deception (Bryman and Bell, 2007). Potential harm to the participants was identified as a risk, in that participants were asked to talk about their approach to managing and working with disabled people. This invited them to share ideas and experiences which potentially could be discriminatory and in contravention to company policy, which if then shared with other staff or managers could be detrimental to the individual. This risk was mitigated by guaranteeing confidentiality to individuals, which included an assurance that there would be no feedback to the company on the content of individual interviews.

Consent was obtained from all participants at the start of the interview: this included reviewing with the person the nature of the research, their part in it and the guarantee of confidentiality. All interviewees were assured that they could withdraw, and that their withdrawal would not be brought to the attention of the company.

It was recognised that disability is a sensitive issue, and that people may have personal experiences that they did not wish to share, and to seek such information would be an invasion of their privacy. The interview schedule was designed specifically not to ask any questions concerning individual experience of disability, and no attempt was made to engage people over this issue. Where people chose to freely share their own experiences of disability within their own lives or within their family and friends, this was accepted and used as part of the data. Only data provided within the interviews was used: on occasion people would share information after the end of the interview over personal experiences, but this was not used as part of the analysis.

The aims of the research were discussed and made clear to the company and the individual participants. There were no covert aims to the research, and hence no concerns over deception in regard to the interviewees or the organisation.

In terms of other ethical issues, there were no data protection issues as no data covered by the Data Protection Act 1998 was involved (Saunders et al, 2012). In regard to the relationship with Breadco, no incentives were offered to the company to participate, nor were there any requirements placed on the research by the company

in terms of outcomes. Breadco were informed that the research would be used towards a PhD thesis and potentially research papers, which they agreed to. It was agreed that the company would not be directly named, but would be referred to using a pseudonym.

## **Data analysis**

The interviews were recorded and then professionally transcribed. When the transcripts were received they were read through, both to familiarise with the data, and to check for any obvious errors in the transcription which were then checked against the tapes and corrected.

The objective of the analysis was to move into a deeper understanding of the data, analysing themes and perspectives (Creswell 2009). The process recognised that qualitative data analysis 'is a process of inductive reasoning, thinking and theorising', involving 'sensitive insights' (Taylor and Bogden 1998:140). The aim was to categorise the data in a systematic and consistent way (Mason, 1996), using coding to organise segments of the text (Creswell 2009) in a way to raise it to a conceptual level (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). In doing so the intention was to develop concepts and propositions. Concepts are taken as ideas drawn generally from the data that can shed light on social processes that not easily perceived from specific instances, whilst propositions will be general statements drawn from the data (Taylor and Bogden, 1998).

The first step was to place the interviewees into groups.

Operational Board: these were the designated members of the Operations Board responsible for the overall management of the company.

Middle managers: this was a more diverse group of managers lying below the Board carrying out a range of functions.

Human resources managers: these were staff specified as carrying out HR or training and development functions



Front-line managers: these were managers of staff teams, principally within the bakery and transport sections, who were responsible for staff teams of front line workers.

Front line staff: these were members of front line teams within the bakery and transport sections. This included shift leaders, on the basis that there were carrying out direct operational work as part of the team.

The rationale for dividing these staff into these broad groups was to enable any differences between these groups to be analysed: it is recognised that the sample size is not sufficient to undertake any statistical analysis, but this was never an objective of this approach. The allocation of individuals into these groups was undertaken on the basis of the structure charts provided, plus the brief descriptions of the roles given by each person at the interview. It is recognised that this allocation is not based on any strict hierarchy within the company, although there is a clear management line in place. Rather they are broad divisions to aid analysis, but the boundaries are not rigid, and the categories are more a convenient way of dividing up the spectrum of roles covered by the study.

The next step was to categorise the data using the basic framework of the semi-structured interview. Each transcript was reviewed, and answers to the questions categorised against each question area. Given that there was flexibility within the interviews, some judgement had to be used in allocating comments to specific area, and some comments did not fall readily into any area and needed to be considered separately. As the analysis progressed the data was further broken down using additional codes that emerged from the data (Creswell, 2009). These codes are set out in appendix 3. The data was reviewed as the analysis progressed, and codes were changed, added, merged and deleted as appropriate. The data was handled using a spreadsheet system that allowed the data coded and categorised efficiently. A sample of the spreadsheet is shown in Table 3

Interview	Area 1	Area2	Area3		Comment
30	disability	experienc	getting work	fl	I don't, I don't really know to tell you the truth. I mean, is it prejudice, I don't know. Other people think they're up to a job, I mean some people, I've worked with people that are slow, you know, and, but it's not, you've just got to know how to handle them I suppose, I don't know
30	disability	problems	stigma	fl	And when you talked about prejudice, where do you think that comes from with work? B: I honestly, I honestly don't know really.
19	DDA	value		ob	Yeah I think discrimination, I mean, the rights against all types of discrimination you say that it's...be there to, sort of, and I think at this stage of the [inaudible 13:24] and understand if they get it they're required to yeah.

Table 3 : sample of spreadsheet used for analysis

In analysing the data the position taken in line with Ulrich's approach was that the interviewees are seen as the 'involved', in that they have input into the system. Having categorised them as 'involved' the analysis was focused on exploring the three sources of influence they hold, that of motivation, control and expertise. Hence the analysis was focused on answering three general questions, the first being concerned with why social actors in the system act (ought to act) as they do in relation to disabled workers? The second was around what responsibility social actors have (ought to have) in regard to how the system responds to disabled workers? The final question considers the basis for the views that social actors hold regarding what is (ought to be) done in relation to disabled workers? In order to focus on these questions and to utilise the rationality framework as developed in chapter four, three different analyses were used, which were a thematic analysis, an assumption analysis and a framework analysis.

The thematic analysis involved reviewing the content of the answers to build up a picture of the views and perceptions of the interviewees. This was done for all interviews, and was undertaken to provide insight into how the people think about the first two questions outlined above. From this analysis six general themes emerged. These were a) general concepts of disability, b) general approach of business to disability, c) perceptions of support to disabled people within the workplace, d) viewpoints on the Disability Discrimination Act, e) issues on how to respond to disabled people within the workplace, f) rights.

The second was an assumption analysis, undertaken to focus on the third question. The responses were analysed in terms of the inherent assumptions the interviewees appear to hold when answering. Ulrich highlighted the importance of boundary judgements, which he regarded as '*synthetic, relatively a priori judgements*, that is, they cannot be justified either logically (as can analytical judgements) or empirically (as can synthetic a posteriori judgements)' (Ulrich, 1983:224, his italics). Hence it is seen as crucial to consider the judgements or assumptions that people within the sample group hold that defines their worldview. Ulrich further identifies that when considering the 'affected', which in this analysis we have taken as disabled workers (current or potential), the essential point is that they must be given the chance of emancipating themselves from 'being treated merely as means for the purposes of others' (Ulrich, 1983:257). He sees the crux being that the different concerns of the involved and the affected may be fundamentally conflicting, due to them being rooted in different world views '*Weltanschauungen*', that is, different visions of social reality and human life as it ought to be (Ulrich, 1983). The 'ought-to-be' as defined by the social model does envisage an emancipated working role for disabled people, but what is of concern in this analysis is to understand the world-view of the involved who determined the fate of disabled workers. Hence the focus on exploring the assumptions that underpin their answers.

To demonstrate the approach, a single answer can be deconstructed: this is a middle manager talking about the problems he thought disabled people faced in life:

'I would have thought the first thing that they will come up against will be sort of prejudice and people who have already got a view about disabled people, rather than people that actually can take a considered view on disabled people. The challenges that people face around mobility for physical disabilities to me are obvious. You know? Some of the challenges around actually getting about the place and just living an independent life will be quite significant. In terms of the mental social disabilities I think there's a bigger challenge there because actually it's not always obvious and people might well be judged unfairly, on first impression, without understanding the issues that that individual is facing.'

From this answer three assumptions he appears to make can be drawn, the first being that people are prejudiced about disabled people. The second is that the challenges

faced by physically disabled people are obvious. The third is that the challenges around 'mental disability' are less obvious.

No attempt was made to determine if those assumptions are 'correct', or if they were based on evidence or experience. The issue is that these appear to be assumptions that the person holds, that then sets in context their response, and which underpins their world-view. Clearly this exercise is to a degree subjective: there was no opportunity to return to the individual to test out with them the analysis, or to explore further if the assumptions apparent from their answers are indeed held by them. However, the value of the exercise is to some extent to look behind their answers to understand their boundary judgements. Within this analysis the staff were considered as a whole staff group<sup>23</sup>, rather than in the specific staff groups. The data was systematically reviewed, and apparent assumptions within the answers highlighted and grouped. When this was done the apparent assumptions inherent to the responses appeared to fall into six main themes. These were assumptions about a) disabled people, b) how people respond to disabled people, c) work, d) accommodating disabled people in work, e) the company and the management and f) the role of government and legislation. When analysing the assumptions, the common ideas that emerged were obviously not universally held, and there were always dissenting views from the majority viewpoints, but fairly consistent and widely held ideas were apparent. It is also the case that assumptions can be contradictory, which may or may not be recognised by individuals.

The third was a framework analysis, which involved drawing together the first two analyses against the rationality framework set out in chapter four (Fig 10). In this analysis the thematic and assumption analyses were used to see how the staff groups aligned to the different rationalities set out in the framework, both in terms of how they saw the system working, and how they felt the system ought to work. The process involved a number of stages. The first was to review the initial and assumption analysis to identify where the thinking aligned with the elements identified within any of the quadrants within the rationality framework. In undertaking this analysis it was not

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<sup>23</sup> The term 'whole staff group' will be used when referring to the total sample of people interviewed

anticipated that the staff groups would fit neatly into one or the other of the rationalities within the framework, which proved to be the case. As might be reasonably expected, there was both variation within staff groups, and inconsistencies in the rationalities of individuals who demonstrated conflicting ideas and notions about disability and employment within their answers. The aim was to use the framework to build a picture of the competing and conflicting rationalities that operate across the staff groups when they considered implications of having disabled people within the workplace. The second stage was to consider whether the staff groups identified different rationalities in terms of the 'as-is' and 'ought-to-be'. Central to this element of the analysis was to identify what barriers people identified to moving to the 'ought-to-be' position.

## **Validity and Reliability**

Having set out the approach to data analysis it is necessary to consider how validity is promoted, given that qualitative researchers do not claim that there is a single correct way of interpreting data (Janesick, 2000). It has been pointed out that reliability is not seen as significant by some (Gray, 2009), to the extent that the contested debate over validity leads to the idea of abandoning any concerns over validity (Gergan and Gergan, 2008). Whilst this seems an unduly pessimistic perspective, warnings over the methodological challenges inherent to management research (Gill and Johnson, 2010) reinforce the requirement for critical reflection on behalf of the researcher (Lincoln and Guba, 1983 cited in Gill and Johnson, 2010). One particular risk is that of anecdotalism (Silverman, 2000), using unrepresentative samples to support particular conclusions. In approaching this issue of validity, a number of elements can be considered. The analysis seeks to draw out concepts rather than simply provide description (Punch, 1998), using rich thick description which includes the use of data that does not fit with the general thrust of the outcomes (Creswell, 2009). All of the data has been used, along with repeated comparisons as the analysis has progressed (Silverman, 2000). The use of semi-structured interviews is seen as providing a high degree of validity as this provides opportunity to clarify responses through the use of further questions, delving more deeply into responses and their meaning (Saunders et

al 2012). Triangulation is seen as valuable in improving levels of confidence in a piece of research, although it is not possible to prove research to be right in itself (Denscombe, 2009). The use of triangulation through multiple data sources within the case study (Gill and Johnson, 2010) was not possible, partly due to the agreement with Breadco over the nature of the research study and partly due to the absence of specific documentation on their approach to disability.<sup>24</sup> However, there was a degree of internal triangulation, firstly in terms of using a sample of staff from different levels within the organisation (Gray, 2009). This provided opportunity to both compare data from different staff groups, and also to gain a wide perspective over the conceptualisation of disability within the organisation. Secondly the data was analysed in three different ways, which provided opportunity to look for convergence around concepts from differing approaches. Overall there is an audit trail (Lincoln and Guba, 1983 cited in Gill and Johnson, 2010) to support the research, which includes a clear statement of the standpoint of the researcher in undertaking this research. This researcher is conscious of the warning from Seidman, (1998) that frequently it is the researcher's interests alone that are served. As such what has been sought is an ethical approach that recognises the interests of those at the heart of the research, that is disabled workers. In general validity depends on whether or not the research can be seen to explain or shed light on the issues it claims to be concerned with (Mason, 1996). In this case the research aim is to gain insight into how managers and co-workers conceptualise disability within a commercial workplace. The use of a qualitative approach, using an interview structure that focuses on the interviewees thinking and ideas around both disability and employment, appears a reasonable and valid approach to meeting this research aim.

In terms of reliability, the issue of generalisability is of importance, given that one of the research objectives is to use the insights gained from the analysis to put forward ideas that could be useful in the further development of policy and practice around disability and employment. Whilst case studies are open to criticism that they cannot be credibly used for generalisation (Desncombe, 2009), it is argued that they can

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<sup>24</sup> This was not due to a refusal to provide documents, but an absence of them. The company was open that this was an issue that they have not addressed, and had no strategic or operational documentation in regard to disability.

produce generalisation by the development of new concepts in regard to what has been studied (Punch, 2005), and the production of hypotheses explored through further research (Gray, 2009). When considering generalisability, a number of aspects can be focused on. One is that of the sample used, in that it should be diverse with sufficient variation to support applying the findings to other areas (Punch, 2005), which links how heterogeneous is the population involved is likely to be (Gomm et al, 2000). In this case, the issue would be the probable 'typicalness' of Breadco and its whole staff group in regard to the issue being researched. In regard to this, there is no evidence that Breadco is either a specialist or leading employer of disabled people (it makes no claim to this), nor is there evidence of Breadco being highlighted as a specifically problematic employer in regard to disability or equality in general. They are not a highly specialist firm in terms of what they do, nor is there any evidence that identifies them as a firm with an idiosyncratic or unusual approach to management or organisational arrangements. Clearly they are a specific type of firm, in their case a large food manufacturing organisation, and have a history and culture that is specific to them. Whilst it should not be claimed that the sample is representative of all other staff and management groups, it should provide a 'meticulous view of particular units' (Mason, 1992:92) which could have a wider application than the sample itself.

Another aspect of generalisability to be considered is concerning the degree to which the context is described, such that others can assess how transferable the findings may be to another setting (Punch, 2005). Whilst there is some context provided in terms of describing Breadco, the use of a qualitative method should provide rich data which should contain significant levels of contextual detail. Overall, whilst recognising that in purist terms any findings can be held to only apply to the population from which they were drawn (Bryman, 2008), it should also be recognised that any case study will have elements that are unique to it, and elements that are similar to other situations (Punch, 2005). When drawing generalisations from this case study it would seem appropriate to adhere to the guidance from Payne and Williams (2005), by being both cautious and modest in generalising, meticulous in how conclusions link to the data, and open about the variations that can be found within the sample group.

Having set out methodology used in this study, the next chapter will consider the analysis of the data. It will look at the three different analyses undertaken, and then discuss the findings.



## Chapter five - Analysis

### **Outline of analysis**

This chapter sets out the analysis of the research material. This is presented in three sections. Firstly a thematic analysis, exploring the general content and findings from the interviews. Secondly an assumption analysis, looking at the assumptions underlying the responses made by the whole staff group. Thirdly a framework analysis, utilising the rationality framework developed in chapter four. This last analysis draws together the findings from the thematic and assumption analyses in order to gain further insights into the data and identify the key findings from the research.

The research highlights that despite a generally sympathetic approach to disabled people, the sample group were ambivalent about disabled people in the workplace. The basis of this ambivalence is identified as three key barriers that people perceive, which inhibit them from moving to a more supportive approach. These are the way they see disabled people as less able, their anxieties over the impact on co-workers over accommodating disabled people, and their perception that work and work roles are fixed. It is identified that underpinning these barriers are two key themes. The first is how people conceptualise fairness within the workplace, and the impact this has on how people expect to be treated. The second is how people conceptualise the nature of work as competitive at an organisational and individual level, which when linked to the concept of fairness impacts on how people expect disabled people to be accommodated within the workplace. This conflicts with the generally sympathetic thinking people have about disability, and it is argued that the way people rationalise this conflicted thinking is to conceptualise the disabled worker differently to the disabled person in general.

There are then two further sections, which consider implications arising from the analysis, firstly in regard to organisational responses to disability, and then in regard to policy approaches around disability and employment.

## Thematic analysis

In undertaking this analysis the answers were collated into six main areas. These were general concepts of disability, the general approach of the company to disability, perceptions of support to disabled people within the workplace, viewpoints on the Disability Discrimination Act, issues on how to respond to disabled people within the workplace, and finally rights.

Table 4 summarises which questions were collated into these areas. This provides the general scheme of classification. Flexibility was used, and where people provided data in response to specific questions, or in response to prompts, they were considered under the most appropriate area.

### ***General concepts of disability***

Unsurprisingly most people expressed ideas around disability in line with the medical model of disability, with a strong focus on physical disability. Generally disabled people were seen as less able, limited in what they could do and 'different'. In many ways people struggled to explain what they defined as disability beyond simple ideas of impairment. For example, one middle manager demonstrated many of the dilemmas people faced when asked to simply define a disabled person;

*'That's a good question. Somebody who has a physical or mental, I was going to say disability but that's almost using, I can't use that can I? So somebody who has a physical or mental, I was going to say abnormality, but it's not that, I, okay, it's a very interesting question. What's a disability? Somebody who is not able to perform physically or mentally something that the majority of the population would be able to achieve.'*

*'Okay, okay. And what, on that basis, how would you define a majority? Where would you, any way of drawing a line in your view?'*

*'Majority would be the wrong word. What I would expect and I don't want to use the word normalised.'*

*'Okay, well you, obviously, yeah.'*

*'What would I expect a normal person to be able to do?'*

*'Right.'*

*'That a disabled person might not be able to do cause in lots of cases they are perfectly capable...'*

*'Right.'*

*'..of doing things that any normal, any able bodied, physically, mentally or able bodied person would be able to do as well.'*

*'Okay.'*

*'So I'm really struggling to answer that question.'* (John : Middle manager)

Area	Question
General concepts of disability	<p>How would you define someone as disabled ?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>What is different about them in your view?</i></li> </ul> <p>What kind of problems do they (disabled people) face in life ?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Where do you think these problems come from</i></li> </ul> <p><i>Of stigma is mentioned, follow up with exploration of where they think stigma comes from</i></p> <p>What in general could/should be done about those problems ?</p> <p>What kind of problems do they face in getting a job ?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>How does this differ to someone who is not disabled?</i></li> </ul>
General approach of the company to disability	<p>What approach does the Company have towards employing disabled people ?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>should it have a specific responsibility around employing disabled people ?</i></li> <li>- <i>why should(not) it have such a responsibility</i></li> <li>- <i>how do you think it is doing ?</i></li> </ul>
Perceptions of support to disabled people within the workplace	<p>Should disabled people have any specific support around doing their job ? <b>(closed question, answer followed by)</b> why is that ?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>who could/should fund that support ?</i></li> <li>- <i>how much support would be reasonable ?</i></li> </ul>
Viewpoints on the Disability Discrimination Act	<p><i>Are you aware of the Disability Discrimination Act</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>what does it mean to you ?</i></li> <li>- <i>do you think it is necessary/effective (closed question, followed by) why is that ?</i></li> </ul>
Issues on how to respond to disabled people within the workplace	<p>Should other people adjust how they work to support disabled people in carrying out a job ? <b>(closed question, answer followed by)</b> why is that ?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>how much change would seem reasonable to you</i></li> <li>- <i>how would you feel if a disabled person did not seem as productive as other people</i></li> </ul> <p>Dilemmas – how would you respond to these situations</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) a disabled person tries hard, but cannot manage to work as fast as everyone else around them</li> <li>b) a disabled person can do most of the job satisfactorily, but they cannot manage one or two parts of the job, which happen to unpleasant, and would have to be done by another member of the team.</li> <li>c) A disabled person has periods of time when they simply cannot work, and so have a lot of time off sick</li> <li>d) a disabled person can do a job, but everyone else in the team would have to change the way they work</li> <li>e) a customer complains that it has been difficult to understand a disabled person who has a speech impediment</li> </ol> <p><b>The responses will be explored with the person as to why they take the view they do, and how it may make the disabled person and the other staff feel.</b></p> <p>If you could make one change to improve the approach around disabled people within the company, what would it be ?</p>
Rights	<p>Do you think disabled people should have a right to a job if they want to work ? <b>(closed question, answer followed by)</b> why is that ?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>should they have a right not to work if they do not want to ?</i></li> </ul> <p>Where do you think rights comes from</p> <p>Where do you think morals come from</p>

Table 4 Questions collated into main areas

Others were rather more forthright;

'Somebody who has disability. Somebody who walks funny or talks funny or looks funny.' (Pete: Frontline worker)

There was a wide recognition some people were disabled on the grounds of their mental state, although this was much less well articulated. There was very little articulation of a 'barriers based' concept of disability in line the social model. People did identify that disabled people faced barriers, especially around physical access, but they did not then locate the problem as a failure of society, rather that of disabled people fitting into the way things are. As one person put it;

'I think with some of them there's actually physical challenges just to, to live in the society we've got. You know, I can imagine the sort of thing, being blind sort of thing, just to physically do the things that I might want to do, I would face potentially some physical obstacles that would make it harder for me to do what I wanted to do.' (Philip: Middle manager)

This particular quote demonstrates a recurring theme that emerges when people are trying to conceptualise disability. Whilst managing a degree of empathy in terms of recognising the problems a disabled person might face, the focus is still on the person seeing it in terms of it being '...harder for me'. There is no accompanying assertion that such problems are unnecessarily created or are oppressive in nature. It is the sympathetic response of a person comfortable with society and their place in it, with little indication that they are motivated by any sense of injustice on behalf of another.

Frequently people asserted that they did not know much about disability, although there was a minority of people who self-declared high levels of experience of disability, usually related to a member of their family. This latter group also mostly asserted that this experience had changed their perceptions of both disability and how society responds to disabled people. Most of their disability-related experiences and ideas focused on their increased awareness of the difficulties faced by disabled people, alongside the poor attitudes of others that did not recognise the problems and capabilities of disabled people. Indeed, one person was openly critical of a disabled relative who, in their assessment, was not making the most of what they could do.

When considering what problems disabled people faced generally, physical access was the most widely recognised issue, followed by that of attitudes. Again, this did not necessarily reflect a social model based concept of attitudes. The general view was that disabled people were not accepted due to the inherent nature of disability, rather than the problem lying with some flaw in the thinking of non-disabled people. There were only a few references to disabled people being overtly badly treated. However, there was more comment on the issue of stigma, which was recognised as an issue faced by individuals. When explored further, people identified that they thought this stemmed from ignorance, linked to a lack of education about disability, alongside a fear of difference linked to the idea that people seek 'sameness'.

'I suppose it's partly to do with ignorance. Like I was saying, if you don't particularly know someone with a disability there maybe preconceptions. I'd say are probably your two biggest problems. But also because you might see they're different to you and some people don't like different, they like everything the same. It's like when people go abroad and they stick to exactly the same food because they don't want to have food that's different, because they have an assumption that it's not something that they're going to like. They sort of see prejudice as being the same thing, they've got an assumption they're not going to like the person because they're different. Even though they don't necessarily know them.' (Jenny: HR manager)

Interestingly the few people who referred to the term normality often exhibited uncomfortableness when making such a reference. Indeed the social awkwardness that people feel around disability was well-attested by some, identifying that often people wished to avoid causing offence, to the point of seeming uncaring or avoiding the issue altogether. It is worth noting that throughout the interviews there was quite careful use of language, along with instances where people flailed rather desperately to find appropriate terms. Whilst what was said cannot be taken as directly representative of their terminology outside the interview, the absence of any of the traditional derogatory terms for disabled people is perhaps indicative of the respect that people feel impelled to show around disability. There was also a strong sense of historical legacy, that the way things are (and the way people think) are the products of a long history.

The general conceptualisation of disability did not throw up unexpected results. There is a strong sense of the able-bodied norm across the interviewees, a norm that was taken for granted. One person's definition of disability was uncompromising in that sense;

'Disabled ? Obviously not abled-bodied.' (Bill: Frontline worker).

Not that Bill was then readily able to define able-bodied, as he went on, without prompting, to muse on what it might mean:

'Disabled [pauses]. If somebody's not 100 per cent able. I can't really define where would you say if they've got a finger missing, does that make them disabled? Or a thumb? Specifically, a thumb, because you can't grip without a thumb, so I would assume that would make you disabled. There's a fair range of spectrum there, isn't there?' (Bill: Frontline worker)

Whilst people regularly recognised that disabled people face significant problems, there were no strong opinions that the problem lay in the inherent design and approach of society, rather than in the inherently 'different' nature of disability. Whilst there was recognition of stigma, and its roots in ignorance, the response was in some ways passive: it was acknowledged but not seen as something that needed to be changed urgently, and indeed the idea of it being a historical legacy seems to reinforce the general sense that it was no-one's fault as such. Indeed, when the issue of what should be done to improve matters was explored, one common theme was that attitudes needed to change, often being linked with schools and having children come together so that they would not then see disabled people as 'different' in the future. The idea that having contact with disabled people would change attitudes was put forward by a number of people, as if it would be some form of osmosis. But no-one suggested that the problem lay within the non-disabled population and that there should be an active process of challenging attitudes. People recognised that doing more around access was needed (although this was usually simplistic ideas around ramps), and there were a number of views around 'creating opportunities' for disabled people. This seems to reflect an interventionist approach focused on the disabled person rather than society as a whole. Indeed there was little support for any approach that required people to change: as one HR staff member stated:

'I mean I don't think it's something that can be forced but I think it's maybe an option to have voluntary sort of workshops maybe that people could go on. And just have more contact with people who are disabled. It's a difficult one because if you try and enforce it from somewhere higher up then people might get a bit resentful and sort of say, well they're getting special treatment. But you want people to just mix a bit more.' (Jenny : HR staff member)

The issue of special treatment was one that was treated with suspicion: as one person rather pithily put it;

'But where do you stop with these ramps? Put ramps where? For getting in and out of the house? That's fair enough. But where do you stop from there? They'll be building ramps at every place in the country won't they.' (Pete: Frontline worker)

Whilst there was a wide range of views and perceptions, the general concept people held of disability shows little evidence that the social model assertion that disabled people are oppressed had made much inroad to their thinking. There was little denial of the problems disabled people faced, but the responsibility was not laid at the door of society, but rather in the inherent problems of impairment.

The views on disability showed no major variations between the staff groups, although the frontline staff tended to be more forthright in their descriptions. However, when the issue of problems disabled people faced in getting work, there were some differences. The operational board group were focused, perhaps unsurprisingly, on access, along with a strong emphasis that employers would make assumptions about disabled people. This included concerns over how disabled people would fit into work, and how their capabilities would change over time. In making this point the inference seems to be that employers have a greater concern over the potential decline in capabilities of disabled workers compared to non-disabled staff. As one member of the operational board put it;

'And then I suppose there's what do we know and understand about their disability, is that disability at a point where, where we can quantify now, is it likely to get worse over time, if so how do we manage that as an employer, do we get to a point where we, where we say actually for whatever reason, the job we are asking you to do is something you are no

longer physically capable of doing , and how do we manage that employee relation piece. So I think those are all questions that employers may ask themselves' (Martha: Operational Board)

Middle managers showed some differences in their ideas about employers' assumptions, identifying that there will be some differentiation over the types of disability, implying that some are seen as acceptable (and hence, by inference, seeing some as non-acceptable).

'It's not too bad as long as you get the right sort of people, the disabled. It's going back to how disabled they are, really, isn't it? If somebody was very disabled, who's wheelchair-bound and can't go to the toilet, anything like that, that might be a bit OTT. Is it somebody who's just got ... one eye? Is it somebody who's just ... there's a hell of a difference at every level of disability.' (Jack: Middle manager)

The above quote is indicative of a common theme that runs throughout the analysis, which is that people tend to see the issue of disability as reasonable if an impairment is not that great in relation to the situation. It is also perhaps indicative of the perception of the 'otherness' of disabled people. In a society where disabled toilet facilities are fairly common, the jump to the idea that being a wheelchair user would naturally mean being unable to use the facilities seems rather reactionary (or perhaps just flustered). For this person, at least, 'the disabled' do appear to be a different tribe.

Health and safety was also cited by middle managers as a significant issue in employers' assumptions, and that generally disabled people will be seen as more of a risk. The HR group were more focused on employers' assumptions over the additional costs, but also stressed that employers would wish to be focused on ensuring that disabled workers were able to do the job. Frontline managers, as with all the groups, identified that disabled people would be seen as less able, but were more overt in stating that employers would not want the 'hassle' of employing disabled people. As one manager put it;

'I think if, you know, if I'm being honest, I would imagine that there's a view that people would find it a bit of a hassle, you know, in terms of it's something else they've now got to do. It's, you know, we now have to fit a ramp, we now have to fit a lift, you know, we now have to supervise this person because, you know, they can't make a cup of tea or they can't get



into the canteen and, you know, so I think possibly, you know, that's what your ...'

*'And do you think that's an unreasonable reaction?'*

'No because it's, it's a practical, I think in one sense it's a practical reaction because it's about people saying, well okay that person's going to be in my site of my office, so what implications is that going to mean for me.'

(Carl: Frontline manager)

As a group they were mixed over whether or not this was reasonable, but they also tended to revert to considering the practicalities as they saw it around employing disabled people. It was the frontline workers who were most forthright about identifying that employers would not want the hassle or expense of disabled people, and for some of this staff group this was seen as a reasonable approach, with a minority seeing it as unfair. They were also clear that it will be assumed that disabled people will struggle in the work environment.

This feedback was about how people saw the general picture around disability and employment. One issue that was common across most of the staff groups was that they regarded the approach of employers in general as 'unfair', except the frontline staff group who were rather more of the view that it was reasonable. This general perception of unfairness can be contrasted to the suspicion over special treatment, and the issue of fairness is one that is further developed when staff considered how disability should be approached within their own working environment. It may also be that front line staff, who have no specific recruitment responsibilities, may be more willing to express viewpoints that others were reluctant to give credence to. It is also of interest that throughout there was a sense that the problem lies with disabled people, including their attitude and confidence in regard to work. This latter point raises the question as to whether this is masking a reluctance by managers to acknowledge the likelihood of a more hostile reaction to disabled people in joining established workgroups.

When considering the general concepts of disability expressed by the whole staff group, the central theme is one of sympathy, seeing disabled people as facing difficulties that should in some way be addressed. However, what is striking is that despite the recognition that there should be improvements in the approach to

disabled people; the problem is grounded in the nature of disability. Whilst people do identify that people should respond better to the difference that is inherent to disability, it is more that society should be more accepting of disability. What it does not seem to include is any notion that society is inherently oppressive, or that fault lies with the non-disabled majority. No-one stated that 'we are' (or even 'I am') to blame for the experiences of disabled people. There is sympathy for disabled people, as their disability makes it difficult to fit in, and hence it is up to non-disabled people to make more effort to help them. This sympathetic approach seems underpinned by the basic conceptualisation of disabled people as generally less capable, the medical model seemingly still well entrenched in people's thinking over disability.

### ***General approach of the company to disability***

When asked about the company's specific approach to disability the general response was that the company did not have one (the other variation was that people did not know of one). The follow-on response to this was mostly that the company would respond to disabled people on the basis of the company 'values', and that therefore it followed that disabled people would be treated fairly and without discrimination. As one person put it;

*'I think that the company would say it was an equal and fair employer of people with and without disabilities.'*

*'And that's what the company says?'*

*'Yeah.'*

*'How would you feel about it?'*

*'I think that that's probably correct. I think that that is the case. I can't speak for anybody else but I think generally that's the case here.'* (Keith: Frontline manager)

The HR group, and to a lesser extent the frontline managers, whilst recognising that there is not a specific approach to disability, were clear that it would be based on an equal opportunities approach. This is perhaps unsurprising given the specific role of HR in recruitment, and that frontline managers are likely to be engaged in greater levels of on-going recruitment. Whilst the frankness of the response in recognising there is no specific approach is commendable, the reliance on the 'values' of the firm as the safeguard of fairness raises the issue of why the values of the firm, which are clearly respected and valued by the whole staff group, had not forced them into considering the issue of disability. People did seem receptive to the issue once it was raised via

this research, but until this happened the 'values' did not seem to have made people recognise the issue. There was clearly some sensitivity within the company: the Head of HR (who is on the Operational Board) identified that the HR team were quite apprehensive, citing the example of a recent staff survey in which they intended to include monitoring on disability;

'...we've got a monitoring evaluation sheet going out. We've done it before, we've actually covered off disability. There's some kind of, again just in trying to get a group together to say 'are you happy with this questionnaire going out? There's some pushback coming to say that sensitivity to going out and asking people about physical impairments or...'

*'Where's the pushback coming from?'*

'From some of the HR team, just about...'

*'Because ?'*

'They don't want to hurt anybody's feelings about asking.'

(Sarah: HR Lead, Operational Board)

It is also fair to point out that people were very frank about not knowing how they were doing, and that they recognised that they were individually and collectively ignorant of what they were, or should be doing.

When asked if they thought the company had a specific responsibility to employ disabled people, the responses were quite mixed. The operational board demonstrated ambivalence, stating that generally they did think they had a responsibility, but then identifying caveats, especially around balancing things. The MD demonstrated this in his answer;

'I have to say, I mean you've asked me the question now, I don't...it comes back to "Is this something we've talked about?" We haven't talked about it. I think we have, increasingly we recognise...I think it comes with scale a little bit, as the business grows, we recognise that we have responsibilities that are broader than just our bottom line. So we have corporate responsibilities which are about the communities in which we operate, it's around our employees etcetera, and I think to that extent, I think we do have some responsibilities. We have to balance that inevitably with, we're also a commercial organisation and therefore we have to make sure we bring in the best people and those that are most capable of doing a particular job. How you balance those two things, that's a great question and I'm not sure I have the answer to it.'

(Gerry: Managing Director, Operational Board)

They also identified a viewpoint that was to be repeated by all staff groups at various points in the interviews, that of not wanting positive discrimination. Underpinning this was a general anxiety about being seen to then discriminate against non-disabled people, a viewpoint made explicitly by one member of the Operational Board

'I think we should have a specific responsibility not to discriminate against disabled people. I don't see why there needs to be a policy to positively discriminate in favour of, necessarily..... I think it's difficult. Why should they, I just...why should they discriminate against the able bodied. I wouldn't want them to discriminate against a disabled person and I wouldn't want them to discriminate against the able person.'

(Martin: Operational Board)

The middle managers were generally positive about holding a responsibility to employ disabled people, linking it with the idea that the workforce should reflect the mix within society or local community. In doing so there were links to the issue of fairness: as one person put it;

'Yes, I think it's fair in...again, it's about fairness, isn't it, in all society. We should have a fair mix of all walks of life within the organisation, whether that be disability, whether that be sexual orientation, whether that be whatever, then there shouldn't be discrimination. I think the company should try and provide employment for all walks of life.'

(Neil: Middle Manager)

In line with a theme that ran throughout the interviews, they were generally positive about a more proactive approach to disability, without giving any clear indication of how this might be done in reality. In this instance it is not clear if they were actually ambivalent over the company taking more responsibility towards employing disabled people, or simply lacked ideas about how it could be done. The HR staff group fell back again onto an emphasis on equal opportunities, plus referring to corporate social responsibility. It is worth noting that Breadco is a member of the One Percent Club, donating 1% of pre-tax profits to charitable causes. However, there was no evidence that people saw this in terms of providing competitive advantage: as the finance director explained;

'I think the community and charity stuff, the one percent thing does give...and also gives people the feeling of it's a Breadco is a decent place to work and does look after and we do...we're constantly embroiled in, sort of, charitable projects and things like that outside of, you know, that people

will take on outside of work because of what starts off in here. So I think it does give a positive overall. Although there's probably not deep studies saying it's around or even that we would look at that would say we just...I suppose it's a bit of a partly driven from the family and partly from the gut feel of how we want to run the business I suppose.'

(Jonathan: Operational Board)

Frontline managers tended more to reject the idea of the company taking on such responsibility, focussing rather on the idea of the best person for the job, and emphasising their responsibilities to the local community. Their concept of this responsibility was explained in general terms, but seems linked to the idea that companies are part of the local community and this then brings some form of social responsibility. As one person explained it:

'But I think all companies have a social responsibility, you know, in as much for the people in the area. If you've got a business in an area you're part of the community and I think you've got social responsibilities to that community as well.'

*'And do you think that's right that you should have that?'*

'Yes I do'.

*'Why is that, do you think?'*

'Well, lots of times that the workforce is local, you know, so although there's only myself of my family work at Breadco...'

*'Right, yeah.'*

'...that all my family contribute in some way to that company, and I think the company should pay back that sort of thing. It's the goodwill of the community that allows companies to operate.'

*'Right.'*

And I think that's a give and take, and I think, you know, companies are part of the community so they should participate.' (Dinah: Frontline manager)

This is a good example of the overall theme that disability (whatever the specific sympathies individuals may have towards disabled people) should not be treated as a special case, but rather within the parameters of the overall approach to staff. Frontline staff were more positive about the notion of responsibility, tending to justify this on the grounds that disability being no-one's fault (not least the disabled person's). But they also tended to regard it as untenable to think about disabled people being on the production line, and that administrative roles should be the place where such responsibility could be exercised, a point put fairly unambiguously by one person;

'Well yeah I suppose anybody could do certain jobs here at Breadco. There's plenty of admin jobs going where people disabled could work there. I don't see any problem with that at all.'

*'Do you think they should have a responsibility to do that?'*

'Yeah. Probably.'

*'Why do you think they should do that?'*

'Oh being disabled is nobody's fault is it, it's, they have to give everybody equal opportunities I feel.' (Edward: Frontline worker)

Throughout the interviews the issue of the company 'values' was raised repeatedly, including when considering the company's approach and responsibilities in regard to disability. These were explored with a number of staff, especially those who referred to the 'family values' of the company. There seems little doubt that these values are seen as significant by managers as explained by a member of the operational board when asked about them;

'And you'll see them dotted around the walls, and I used to have a little book of values, but someone pinched it last week at a similar meeting like this, so that not a good value is it, pinching things. It's things like trust, committing and doing, committing to what you say you're going to do, supporting your colleagues, quality in everything that you do, respecting and empowering the individual, it's really big things like that which are really easy to write down and put on a piece of paper and very challenging to deliver against, and I've worked for this business for 11 years, and before that I worked for two very large global PLCs who had a very similar set of values. Didn't live them, didn't live them.'

*'What makes a difference in Breadco that people are able to do that?'*

'Culture, family ownership and concentration on those values. We're not perfect in any way, in any way, we're far more mindful of them than I think certainly the two other organisations I've worked for, and we spend a lot of time talking about them, we agonise over them, whereas in other businesses I've worked for they're just on the wall.'

(Martha: Operational Board)

The managing director gave a clear explanation of his perspective<sup>25</sup>. He was clear that the ethos emanating from the family was one of long term planning, with a focus on staff care and support. He saw the firm's mission as more than simply pursuing profit, and that the main driver was to pass the firm onto the next generation. As such, an underpinning motivation was loyalty, including to the workforce. This chimes with

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<sup>25</sup> It should be noted that the current generation responsible for the firm are the fifth generation, and they retain majority control and direction of the firm: the MD is not a family member, but provided the nearest direct link to the family in terms of this issue.

viewpoint echoed throughout the operational board and the middle managers, that of being 'strong on people', listening and engagement with staff, and decision making and changes being done for the good of the company, rather than short term profit.<sup>26</sup> This behaviour is seen beneficial, creating a reciprocal relationship between company and staff. The HR lead on the operational board was clear that in many ways the emphasis was on making efforts in regard to existing staff, rather more than potential employees. Indeed she was very frank about the response of managers in terms of recruiting disabled staff:

'You've got the defensiveness of dealing with it (*Disability Discrimination Act*), but because of experiences like that, that's why I think managers actively don't like to recruit the same people. Now you know as well as I do the legislation's there, you can say everything you want about it, but if somebody has got an experience that they've had that before, they will tend to disregard a disabled person. And it happens, that's what happens.'  
(Sarah: HR lead, Operational Board)

At the other end of the spectrum the frontline staff offered strong views on the family values of the firm, with some identifying that the values were being lost: they reflected the previous views that the values were located in being spoken to, being heard and most of all in feeling respected. However, others were unequivocal in their positive viewpoints and regarded the company as caring for the staff. When asked if what was said about the family values was true, one person replied:

' ....it's getting better every day. It's true what you've heard, it really is true.' (Trevor: Front line staff)

The general picture presented by the whole staff group is one where the company is positive about both investing in its staff, and the local nature of the workforce. Given that this was the original bakery site for the firm there is a considerable local history at work, and it was acknowledged that other newer sites elsewhere in the country may offer a different perspective. However, despite all the emphasis on staff and community, disabled workers still seemed to be a relatively unseen issue that had not really been considered. Whether this was an unwitting omission reflecting a general

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<sup>26</sup> It should also be recognised that Breadco has a clear strategic plan to expand its operations in order to achieve national prominence, an objective it is well on the way to achieving. There does seem to be a long term view within the company's planning, but this should not be mistaken for a lack of focus on profitability or growth

lack of recognition of disabled people as potential members of the workforce, or reluctance to engage in the issue due to concerns over its implications, is not clear. But the seeming strength of the values within the corporate culture had not brought this issue to the fore up to this point.

### ***Perceptions of support to disabled people within the workplace***

The issue of whether disabled people should receive additional support in the workplace was a key area for understanding how people might approach disability overall. The operational board and the middle managers generally did not see the need for support above and beyond the general support that should be offered to all staff. Even when they did say that disabled workers should have support they qualified it on the grounds that it should be in line with how all staff are supported, and hence disabled people should be treated similarly to other staff. As one manager put it when asked about specific support for disabled people:

‘I think they may well have special needs that I'm sure could be accommodated as everybody out there has some need, some support that is required and everybody is different, a disabled person I suspect would be no different. So providing they were able, as other people were, to attend their job of work and to carry out the work as required then they should be afforded the support as all other employees are afforded. In fact, that might be slightly different but, nevertheless, I'm sure it...again it depends what you describe as reasonable practice.’ (David: Middle manager).

This is typical of the line people fell back on at various points, showing a willingness to consider accommodations, but then placing within the general context of support, and not regarding accommodations for disabled people as being radically different to any other support.

This group also expressed concerns over the costs, linking this to commercial imperatives, especially if it related to on-going additional costs. The HR group and the frontline managers were generally ambivalent, and expressed quite a degree of conditionality, in that they stressed the importance that disabled staff needed to be able to do the same as non-disabled staff, again alongside concerns over costs. One manager demonstrated this ambivalence and uncertainty in struggling to identify how they thought the company should approach support;



'You know, things like access and, you know, stuff like that I think yes. But why, you know, should you employ somebody that has got specific needs to be able to do a job that, you know, a fit person could do without the extra...it's a difficult call really isn't it? I think it's a bit of a difficult call, that. Very much dependant on what the disability is I think.'

*'How do you mean in terms of what the disability is?'*

'Well, again, you know, if it's somebody who perhaps has got a limb missing would the company have to make some special arrangements to ensure one, that they're safe doing what they're doing and two, that they can, you know, do it efficiently and as good as the next individual.'

*'And you think that would be reasonable or unreasonable or...?'*

'I think it might be asking a lot of the company to do that. But, again, it just depends on the size and the resource of the company doesn't it, you know?' (Will: Frontline manager)

But it should be noted that, as was common, they were at pains to identify that a disabled worker should be able to do the job as well as the next person.

Only the frontline staff group were generally positive, but were not clear as to why they thought this appropriate, and this needs to be set against a fairly common view that disabled people were not suited to production line work. There was some evidence of a victim concept of disability within their answers, such as;

'Because it's bad enough for them being disabled. If you haven't got support you're going to be so isolated on your own, haven't you?'

(Trevor: Frontline worker)

Overall when it came to the concept of support the overriding theme was that of ambivalence: there was no real desire to treat disabled people very differently, and support had to be conditional on being able to do the role 'properly' (alongside further concerns over health and safety). The aim appears to be to fit disabled people into the current system and practice, with concerns that trying to do this may undermine commercial viability.

When asked about how much support might be reasonable, a common comment was that this was a difficult issue as people lacked experience of this area. What was most commonly cited was that there would be a limit to the level of support that should be provided, linked to ideas of reasonableness (which was difficult for people to define) and the impact on commercial viability. The term 'reasonable', which was used

repeatedly as the benchmark for support, was one that people could not explain in terms of what this meant to them in regards to issues of support: as one person put it;

‘Additional support. I think, I was going to use the word reasonable but, you know, I realise that, you know, just using that word is just hopeless isn’t it.’ (John: Middle Manager)

Even when someone tried to look at it in quantitative terms, it seemed unconvincing;

‘Its a very good question, its a very good question, and I think that, a commercial business would do the maths I think and work out the cost of , and this sounds very hard, but, but I think what would happen and should happen, the cost of making these changes , of investing in this support, to support this disabled person is X, the value they deliver is Y , what outweighs, which benefit outweighs, its no different to, you know, you’ve got a highly paid executive, you’ve got role you looking to fulfil, they’re the best person in the world to fill it , they’re looking for 50 grand more than you’re prepared to pay them , they’re not worth it, so you’d walk away. That sounds very hard, but I that there would be that kind of calculation that would be brought to bear.’ (Martha : Operational Board).

Overall there was little experience of determining what might be reasonable, and certainly no process in place to calculate what is reasonable, but as the example above seems to show, people would tend to operate on what they are prepared to pay, based on how it feels. It is interesting to note that the above senior executive chose to illustrate her point by using the example of a top-end executive. This could be taken as reflecting the notion (held at least by senior executives) that such individuals may be worth different amounts linked to their perceived levels of skill and talent. Quite how an approach of offsetting cost and added value might be applied to the frontline staff group is harder to appreciate. Shift hands presented themselves as people there to keep the production line running, undertaking tasks allocated to them. Their value, in terms of the organisation, seems far more fixed than that of senior staff. Hence the issue of any additional costs linked to disability seems sharper; it echoes back to the earlier point made by frontline staff questioning why a company would want to take on the ‘hassle’ of employing disabled staff. In the regimented environment of the production line the scope for an individual to add further value beyond the fixed requirements of their role seems limited.

When it came to the issue of funding support there was a general theme that the funding could be a shared issue between the company and the government. There was a strong sense that central to this was the size of the company, and that it was not reasonable to expect small companies to bear the costs associated with disability, whereas this was seen as much more manageable for a larger company. There were also some concerns expressed about funding unfairly advantaging disabled people. These two latter points, whilst not major areas of discussion or contention within the interviews, do point to some key drivers behind people's thinking. The first is the basic issue of commerciality, which was inherent to the interviews throughout. Hence the viewpoint that disability could incur costs (and thus be a potential burden) was significant. The concern over the capacity of smaller companies to absorb costs seems to reflect a general notion that disability is something to be accommodated if reasonable, reasonableness being related to the competitive environment in which firms operate. What is not espoused is that work should in some general way be restructured to make it more accessible to disabled people. The concern over unfairly advantaging disabled people seems grounded in work being regarded as a competitive process, and hence support might inappropriately impact on the position of non-disabled workers.

### ***Viewpoints on the Disability Discrimination Act***

Awareness levels of the DDA, even within senior management, were low, with occasional exceptions. Frequently managers referred to issues such as the DDA as being the domain of HR, whilst the HR staff themselves did claim some knowledge, but no great expertise. When asked if the DDA was needed the general view was that it was necessary, due to the need to deal with behaviours and prejudices within workforces that are detrimental to disabled people. The Managing Director encapsulated the general viewpoint;

‘...I think it would be nice to think you didn't have to have it, so in an ideal world I don't think you need it. But the reality is people need pushing on a number of aspects so I think there is a need, whether it goes too far in some areas, I don't know, but I think there is a need because I think left to everybody's own devices, we probably wouldn't move to where I believe we should do as a society. But that's not...we don't operate in the ideal world so I think there is room for legislation.’

(Gerry: Managing Director, Operational Board)

Frontline staff were the most positive about the need for the DDA, but included in these views was some element of needing to believe that people were 'genuinely' disabled. Overall there was a discernible viewpoint that the DDA was needed due to the unacceptable behaviour of some people, but that disabled people needed to be treated the same as other people. This requirement to treat people in the same way ties in with the recurrent theme of fairness, which included a clear element that fairness should involve people being generally treated in similar ways. It is seen that it is the behaviour of individuals that generates the need for legislation, but there was no sense in people's responses that the DDA was there to tackle inherent structural problems faced by disabled people, nor indeed that it modified aberrant behaviour. Rather the need for it was focused on the detrimental responses of individuals, but alongside this were some suspicions that the legislation can be abused. As one person rather bluntly put it:

'Why do we call red headed people "ginger nut" and stuff like that? It's just human nature. [Pauses] People are working along with somebody who's different, that person's going to get a bit of stick. Providing that person is strong enough mentally to put up with it, fine, not a problem. But, if they're not, are they going to turn around and say "I'm being abused" and all that kind of stuff? Maybe there's that to look at, I don't know. It is a sad state of affairs when you have to do legislation to make sure that people like that do get a fair chance of a job. Like I say, people should be taken on merit.' (Bill: Frontline staff)

It is interesting that whilst the DDA does set requirements on people to respond, as will be seen in the next section, the general picture from the interviews is that people reject the idea of compelling people to change how they behave. People were clear on what some accommodations could involve (the ubiquitous ramp was oft quoted), but it seems far less clear to people that accommodations could include altering what people do, including what co-workers do. But this fits in with the general theme of disabled workers fitting in, with perhaps slight amendments. The sense is of the DDA lurking in the background, acknowledged but certainly not embraced, any difficulties arising from this area being the responsibility of HR to resolve whilst the system carries on.

### ***Issues on how to respond to disabled people within the workplace***

This in many ways was the most practically based section, and posed the sharpest challenges for people, as it focused on how they thought the practical issues of working with disabled people needed to be dealt with. When asked if staff should change the way they work to accommodate disabled people, the operational board and middle managers generally said yes, but then brought in various caveats. They tended, yet again, to fall back on the issue of reasonableness, their view being that people generally were in themselves innately 'reasonable' and so this should be the driver behind any change in the way they work. Their stance was that people would be reasonable and, therefore, would respond positively as a matter of course. As one manager put it;

'So I would like to think that we're a kind of society, where actually we don't have to say, 'You will do this', but actually it comes naturally to people. And that's about educating people and getting them to understand, and giving them the full picture when dealing with disabled people, and particularly people of a certain disablement in a job.'  
(Clive: Middle manager).

Whilst not doubting the sincerity and intent of this manager's words, it does highlight a key issue. He indicates that the natural response of people is such that they need educating. This implies that the natural response of people is to reject disabled people unless provided with full and compelling evidence to the contrary. The disabled worker remains the 'other', their integration requiring the non-disabled majority to both be willing to learn and then to consent. It is the (perhaps unintended) sentiment of the dominant majority who want to believe in a natural reasonableness when weight of evidence (and experience) tends to undermine such cheery optimism.

The issue of tolerance was further articulated, but linked to the notion that everyone has strengths and weaknesses, and these have to be accommodated.

'Yeah, I don't see a problem in that, as long as it's, you know, within reason. And I think, again, it's part of this...getting over this prejudice problem and part of what you should be doing with...any team member's got strengths and weaknesses, you know, so I think we probably all adapt to any members of your team's strengths and weaknesses. So I don't see a major issue with that, no.' (Jonathan: Operational Board)

This viewpoint raises two interesting points in terms of attitudes. The first is the idea of tolerating weaknesses (as some form of trade off against strengths). This does not seem to acknowledge that the issue may not be one of a 'weakness' but rather that the design and attitudes within a workplace may undermine the individual's capabilities. And secondly it works on the principle of a trade-off: to be perceived as having a weakness may require a compensating strength. As was discussed in the literature review, some disabled workers do complain that this is the case for them, but with added emphasis. Various studies have reported that disabled people have felt compelled to work harder and more effectively than their non-disabled colleagues in order to establish their credentials as a viable member of the workforce.

The operational board and middle managers also referred to the need to explain: this was seen as important, as was the underlying issue of genuineness, in that some people stressed that in such circumstances it must be clear that the disability was genuine. This overall balance between reasonableness, communication and genuineness is illustrated by one of the middle managers;

'What you've got to avoid is other people feeling they have been discriminated against because you've got somebody that can't physically do something that's not nice. So the first thing you've got to do is actually establish that that's genuine. And then, the way I'd approach that with the team, or the individual, I would sit down with people and get the issue on the table and let them resolve it themselves. And I think the majority of people would say, 'Yes, that's fine. We'll understand. It's not an issue.' If it was an issue then I suppose you're into sort of a bit of further education or other job modifications to try and get rid of that part of the job or make it better.' (Clive: Middle manager)

Whilst in many ways this seems a logical approach, it is noteworthy that Clive did not articulate what would have happened if nothing could be resolved. The use of compulsion is one that seems uncomfortable for managers. This comment also illustrates a theme that runs through many of the interviews across all the staff groups, that of worrying that a positive approach to disability will be seen as discriminating against non-disabled people.

The HR staff also agreed that people should change the way they work, again seeing the approach as one of being 'reasonable'; linking this to all parties concerned and focusing on people agreeing to do this. They were clear that they did not concur with

people being forced to change, and that the emphasis should be on agreement and mutual approaches to accommodating disabled people. As the following comment shows, there was some discomfort in seeing it as solely in the gift of the staff, but still wanting a mutually agreed approach.

*'If it's a fairly minor adjustment then why not? With everybody's consent.'*

*'And is that what you would require, people's consent?'*

*'Well consent may be the wrong word to use.'*

*'Okay.'*

*'I think consent is wrong, I would...I think in those sort of circumstances, we would look for an agreement that given, you know, given the circumstances we've got, when this is happening, when that person is doing that particular part of the job, you know, do we all agree that that change has to happen to accommodate it and I think I'd go along with that.'* (Tony: HR manager)

The frontline managers again thought that people should change, but saw it more dependent on what working conditions and risks were involved. They were ambivalent as a group over having to change, preferring to focus on discussions and agreement as the favoured approach. They also demonstrated a degree of pragmatism, focusing on how to make things work:

*'I think that, yeah, you would try and accommodate as much as you could absorb without it becoming, you know, inefficient.'*

*'Right. And how would you know if it was, or measure if it became inefficient? Any ideas...?'*

*'Well, again, you know, it very much depends what it is doesn't it, you know? Or, as well, I think, you know, risk to the individual as well. You know, if...and, like I say, the only sort of real experience I've had is somebody that was deaf and dumb so they couldn't hear the alarms going off so we used to have a lot of flashing lights in the area for different things, so it wasn't specifically for this gentleman but obviously it was a requirement if he was going to acknowledge the alarms to have a light rather than a siren. So, you know, I think that sort of thing is fine.'*

*(Will : Frontline manager)*

The frontline staff demonstrated more mixed views, some positive, some negative and some ambivalent. Again there were concerns expressed that were changes to happen the disability must be genuine, with some references to team working and the need to pull together. Interestingly when frontline staff were clear that people should change the way they work, generally they thought people should be instructed to do so, but there was still an emphasis on explaining things in such circumstances.

Overall, central to the idea of accommodating disabled people by changing the way people work is the issue of consent, even if it is not articulated in these terms. Within the management ranks there seems a great unease at the idea of instructing people to change how they work to accommodate disabled workers. But given their general perceptions that disabled people are potentially less capable than non-disabled people, their anxieties do seem fuelled by a fear that they will push productive members of staff into carrying less productive staff for no legitimate reason. Whilst managers (and staff) do acknowledge the variability of productivity within staff teams, this is informal. To legitimise it, even in the name of disability, seems to be deeply uncomfortable. This can be illustrated further when the issue of productivity was explored. The operational board and middle management expressed some tolerance of the idea that disabled people might not be as productive as other staff. But they also tended to generalise the issue, in that they alluded to the fact (in their view) that within a team of people there would always be variable productivity, and hence this is an issue for all.

‘I mean I have that issue today with people that, you know, that people work at different rates, there’s always a reason why they work at different rates to be honest.’ (Philip: Middle manager)

But they reverted back to the assertion that it about ensuring that people needed to be in the right job for them, alongside fears that non-disabled people would be discriminated against;

‘Because it would be easy to discriminate against a non-disabled person by ignoring a poor performer who was disabled because he's disabled and that wouldn't be fair on a non-disabled person in my eyes.’  
(David: Middle manager)

Whilst toleration over variability in productivity may be claimed, the tendency was towards expecting disabled people work within the company’s requirements alongside everyone else. The HR group showed less tolerance, and were at best ambivalent about this idea: they referred to the theme of ensuring that people were in appropriate roles, such as office roles, and focused on seeking solutions rather than just tolerating the situation. As one HR manager demonstrated in taking a logical approach;



'Right, how would I respond? Let's look at what they've been given to do. Is it reasonable; is it...is it the same as everybody else's workload, best to just check that first. Have we made all the adjustments we need to make. This is typical HR response you see, you know, let's go through all the legal checklists and everything. Done all the adjustments, right okay, had all the training, had all the support that we can do. Okay still not working as productive as everybody else. Can we make adjustments, can we shuffle the workload round a bit so they have tasks that are more suited, so. So, you know, there's HR you see. Having gone to all of that and they're still not as productive then I suppose we have to make the call, well do we just reduce their workload a little bit to something that they can manage.'

(Mary: HR manager)

Frontline managers were generally tolerant, with the emphasis on understanding the situation and working round the issue to resolve it. Linked to this latter point were concerns over the production process. They did not really give any sense of the limits to their toleration on this area, but there were references to the size of a company being a key issue to how this could be tolerated. Frontline staff were split between those who thought it should be tolerated, and those who did not. But within their answers there was a theme of disabled people needing to work hard, and an inherent distrust of people who were not doing as much as others. Again there was evidence of staff seeing the solution as moving disabled people to other roles. As one person put it;

'I would look to find them a different role. Obviously this person's trying, it's not just they're taking the mickey, they're trying. I would look what other roles there is within my little section or even further afield if it needs to be.' (Derek: Frontline worker)

On the issue of whether or not disabled people should have differential remuneration linked to productivity, the overwhelming view was against this. The senior managers expressed a strong sense that remuneration is linked to recruitment and capability, and that this should be the same for everyone. They recognised that individual productivity varied anyhow, and that this needs to be recognised.

'... I think that would be really difficult if the jobs were exactly the same, because if the jobs are the same, yes productivity from different people could be different. But productivity from different people would always be different anyway, but everybody would always be on the same rate for an equivalent job or the same job. So I think that would be very difficult.'

(Eddie: Middle manager)

The HR group and the frontline managers were clearly against, and considered it as a capability issue. The frontline workers were again against it, except for a small number who were adamantly in favour of it. Overall this approach was not popular at all, with the general sense being that people should be brought into roles that are suitable for them, alongside an even stronger sense that there is an inevitable variability in work rates between individuals. But it is worth stressing that no-one articulated that such variation would or should be officially recognised or sanctioned. It seems that it is the formalising of any such arrangements that causes unease. In theory everyone is expected and can be required to be equally productive, even if that is not actually the case. Perhaps managers fear the consequences of establishing that it is acceptable to be 'officially' less productive than the next person (unless, maybe, you have undertaken years of loyal services and have been tragically struck down by incapacity not of your own making). This is perhaps illustrated further when the issue of sickness is considered.

The issue of sickness was explored on the basis of how managers should respond to a disabled person who had to have time off sick due to the nature of their disability. However sickness absence is clearly a general issue and not confined to the sphere of disability, and hence of direct relevance to people. Overall it was clear that the operation of the company policy over sickness absence was something people were very aware of, regardless of any links to disability. The operational board and middle managers tended to the view that disabled people should not be treated any differently to other staff, and even where they thought there should be a difference they wanted to find a solution rather than simply accept the disabled person's level of sickness. Overall they emphasised the need to follow procedures: they did express the view that this was a tricky issue, and whilst there could be more tolerance in the process it needed to bring matters to resolution. They tended to stress the need to find alternative roles for people who had become disabled, but they also worried about the impact on non-disabled staff on taking a differential approach to disabled staff. This issue was one that clearly caused discomfort. On the one hand the Company Secretary's view was quite clear;

'I mean, there are strict procedures in relation to this and in the same way that an able bodied person goes off long term sick and develops a disability there are specific procedures that we have to follow to make sure that we're not discriminating against him as a result of his disability. But as I understand it, no employer is required to employ somebody, continue to pay them, if they're not capable of performing the task for which they were employed and we had taken reasonable steps to relocate them within the business. And you can legitimately dismiss someone for lack of capability even if they are on long term sick provided you follow the strict process and you go through that assessment. So we're not required to maintain a relationship with an individual who's off on long term sick and I suppose a disabled person would be treated in the same way as an able bodied person who's off on long term sick.' (Martin: Company Secretary)

On the other hand there is the view of the Head of HR on the Operational Board when asked about their response to disabled workers who had a lot of time of sick with no prospect of it improving;

'Yes I mean ultimately if you had that kind of situation, we'd either be looking at an alternative, so you might be able to find an alternative job, so you'd go through different options. But in a lot of organisations, it would end up being a Compromise Agreement. Because I don't believe a company would feel comfortable enough dismissing a disabled person the same way you'd dismiss an able bodied person that was off on sickness. Because of the Disability Discrimination Act.'

(Sarah: HR Lead, Operational Board)

It is perhaps unsurprising that the lead for HR is more circumspect over the practicalities of dealing with such an issue. This perspective was shared by the HR staff group who tended to reference back to the need to follow procedure whilst also focusing on the need to be flexible. They were cautious overall, but did want to see the process reach equivalent outcomes to non-disabled staff. They strongly linked disability and serious illness as equivalent issues when considering their approach. As one person put it;

'But I mean you have these policies but I think in some cases they do need to be a bit flexible. So for instance if you knew that someone who had cancer then you wouldn't sort of count every period of absence as they have, you wouldn't count every period of absence, you would treat them differently. So I think with disabled people you'd probably have to do the same.' (Jenny: HR manager)

The frontline managers generally did not see that there should be any difference in approach, but again there was some discomfort in their responses. Again they wanted

to see the same endpoint from the sickness management process for disabled and non-disabled staff (again seeing disability and serious illness as an equivalent), but they did emphasise the need to stick to procedure. As one manager rather plaintively put it:

‘Unfortunately we’re set by the guidelines given out by HR, head office so we’ve got to stick to them cause we’re quite often, can ourselves get our hands slapped when we deviate from the procedure.’  
(Paul: Frontline manager)

When asked why he saw this as unfortunate, he explained further;

‘I think there’s a procedure in place and we’ve got to abide by it. I think it can be very black and white ....at times. And you know the people who will play the system and will push it to its boundaries, likewise, other people who genuinely are ill feel aggrieved at the fact that they’re being tarred with the same brush as the people who are constantly being sick and, so it’s very black and white and we’re restricted by that procedure...but it’s out of our control, so it’s head office that sets the guidelines and we’ve got to abide by them.’ (Paul: Frontline manager)

The frontline staff group were split, with the majority favouring a more tolerant approach. However, there was a strong emphasis within the majority on understanding how people were in regard their abilities when they were taken on, which they saw as a management responsibility.

‘You have to show some compassion, I would think from a management point of view, and accept that when you employed them that’s, that was going to be the case, I suppose. Probably goes with the territory of employing somebody disabled.’ (Edward: Frontline staff member)

The same person then went on to demonstrate a further viewpoint within this staff group, which was that some people get away with playing the system.

‘Down there, there’s a lot of people that are off sick all the time, like, and you know it’s not genuine basically ..... but in a factory you’re always going to get a lot of people that are off for no particular reason, basically just because they can’t be bothered coming in.’  
(Edward: Frontline staff member)

They expressed quite high levels of anxiety, seeing the sickness absence system as effective but harsh. They recognised that it was used to deal with controllable absence, which they saw as reasonable, but that people would always play the system.

The differences in approach to productivity and sickness were noticeable. But there are obvious underlying differences in the two phenomena, the most obvious one being that productivity is far less overt in its presentation than sickness. In terms of sickness, someone is either in work or not, and this is both unambiguous and clearly quantifiable. Productivity at an individual level, especially within teams, is less clear cut; few jobs can be readily measured by unambiguous quantifiable individual outputs. The clear cut nature of sickness absence lends itself to formal process, productivity less so. Both are clearly variable at individual level, but productivity has to be addressed in more general terms. Hence unofficially it can be acknowledged as variable, the key being that overall teams (or whatever unit of production is looked at) are productive enough to be acceptable. Bringing in an official tolerance of lower productivity on the basis of disability is unsettling, however sympathetic people may be. For sickness the picture is the same, in that variable levels of sickness occur and to some degree can be tolerated. However, absence levels are much clearer, and the formal individualised process for sickness management requires equally rigorous treatment of all concerned. What seems common to both is the underlying motivation for not offering a significant different approach to disabled workers, which is requiring people to put in sufficient effort. When it comes to the work contribution of staff, disability is not seen as something that can readily be allowed to undermine the expectations laid on all staff.

When looking at the responses to the issue of how should managers respond to a customer complaining about a staff member with a speech impediment, the key issue seemed to be whether people located the problem with the staff member or the customer. For the operational board, the answer was neither. They tended to feel that the appropriate response was to explain matters to the customer, and to ask of themselves if the staff member was in the right job. They were generally deferent to the wishes of the customer, but accepted that this was the worker's role. Hence they did not blame the disabled worker for the problem, but questioned if it was the right role for them. The middle managers were more mixed in their response: the majority did not see it as the customer's fault, but there was a theme that the customer could be more sympathetic. They also generally questioned if the person was in the right role. They would be supportive, but there was a sense that if someone had recruited them to that role then they, the recruiter, needed to take responsibility for this. The

HR staff group were clear that the issue did not lie with the customer, but with the staff member who was in the wrong role. However, their position was not always that coherent;

'I think if I had a speech impediment person I'd try and keep them out of the way of having to speak to... or having to operate in areas where they weren't particularly comfortable. But I think if they were still getting the job done and it might only be one or two customers, then I think I'd try first of all to establish what the situation was. But I'd try and put them... make sure they're not in a situation where they're doing a lot of speaking on a regular basis. But I'd still want them to have contact with customers .... but I mean for instance someone with a speech impediment, you wouldn't put them on the phone all the time, just answering phone calls unless I suppose they wanted to do that particular role which they might do.'

(Jenny: HR manager)

The frontline managers again did not see the problem lying with the customer, but there was more focus on trying to understand the issue. They did see the problem as lying with the staff member, with their response to the issue to consider a different role for staff member, or monitoring the situation. The frontline staff generally did not see the problem with the customer, although there were some exceptions to this. As one person protested (perhaps displaying the lack of customer engagement inherent to their role);

'I would not expect anybody to be so rude and insensitive as to start complaining that somebody can't speak, just as I wouldn't expect anybody to be saying they couldn't understand an Asian person or a person of another ethnic minority. But unfortunately you do get them sort of people.'

(Sam: Frontline worker)

They were less clear on whether or not the problem lay with the staff member, but there was some questioning of why the person would be that role, or why indeed why they would want to be in that role. Overall across the staff groups the general sense was that the problem did not lie with the customer, although there were some views that the customer ought to be more reasonable, but would not be challenged on this. It was more that the problem lay with the staff member, and that this was due to them being in the wrong role and asking why this happened in the first place, with the reasonable response then being to find an alternative role.

Whilst this element of the interviews was quite specific, and it did not generate very divergent viewpoints across the whole staff group, it did reinforce a major theme running through the interviews. For many people the key issue was how someone was placed in such a role, and the need for managers to take responsibility for their decision making over such a situation. The underlying theme was the need to recruit the right person to the right role, the implications being that it is the person that fits to the role rather than the obverse.

When considering what single change staff might wish to make in order to improve matters in regard to disabled staff, the results were unsurprising. The main ideas were to improve awareness, especially amongst management, to improve physical access, to improve recruitment and to increase the numbers of disabled people employed within the company.

When considering the thinking across all the staff groups about how to respond to disabled workers within the workplace, what is striking is the ambivalence displayed. Whilst there is a generally expressed intent to respond positively to the needs of disabled people, when people considered the practicalities of doing so they inclined to less accommodating approaches. For many the appropriate response was to in some way manage the challenges of disabled people within the general approaches adopted for all staff. What is also notable by its absence is any real acknowledgement that disabled people would bring skills and knowledge as disabled people, or that in general the value of a disabled person would readily outweigh the need to accommodate their different needs. The evidence points more to people adhering to a picture of disability as burdensome and a risk to productivity, rather than them embracing the notion of an inclusive and accommodating workplace.

### ***Rights***

The question of where rights come from was one that many people struggled with, often admitting that they had never really thought about it. The general viewpoint was that they had developed over time, often linked to the idea that people had campaigned or lobbied for them, and hence in some way came from the people. People often linked them to legislation or the government, but often people were not

clear or had no real idea as to where they came from. A not untypical example came from a middle manager;

‘Where do rights come from? Government. It's government-based, isn't it?’

*‘And how does the government work out the basis for what rights they think people should have?’*

[pause] ‘ Hmm. To be quite honest, I haven't a clue. I haven't the foggiest. It's just government-based, isn't it?’ (Jack: Middle Manager)

There was a general sense that they were ‘a good thing’, with no great sense that that people feel their rights were restricted, although a small number of people saw them as being abused. When asked about where morals came from people generally linked it to upbringing, often specifying parents or education. Less commonly people felt that they were from the individual, either that that they were in-bred or chosen by the person. Some people saw them as culturally based, that they were ‘part of society’, often linked to historical development.

When asked about whether or not disabled people had a right to a job, the common theme was that any approach around this issue applied to everyone, and there should be no specific approach around to disabled people. The most frequently expressed view that there was no right to work or a job, but that everyone should have an opportunity to work. As a middle manager summarised it:

‘I don't think anybody has got a specific right to a job and you need the skills necessary to do the role that you're doing. And if disabled people have the skills that are necessary to do the role I believe that they should get... have exactly the same opportunities as an abled person who's got the skills to do the role.’ (Eddie: Middle Manager)

A small number of people identified that there should be specific help offered to disabled people. Likewise there were a small number of people who did state that everyone should have a right to a job. When asked if disabled people had a right not to work, the general view was that disabled people should work if they are able to do so, and should only be allowed not to work (i.e. be supported) if ‘incapable’. There was degree of suspicion over people claiming being incapable of work, along with the idea that disabled people should be encouraged to work.



What seems of most interest from this section on rights is that there is no case made out for disabled people to have specific arrangements over work. There is a clear acceptance (albeit with a degree of suspicion) that some disabled people may be wholly incapable of work and should be supported appropriately, but otherwise disabled people are to be treated the same as everyone else. Whilst this was concerned with the right to work or not work, rather than the practicalities of work, it is indicative of the general theme of seeking not to create any major differentiation between disabled and non-disabled people when it comes to employment.

Overall the thematic analysis gives a rich picture of the viewpoints of the whole staff group in regard to employment and disability. There is no single uniform perspective, but there are some striking themes that emerge. The first is that people generally adhere to a medical model of disability, but claim to regard disabled people as unfairly treated by employers. However, when they are asked to consider the issue of disability more directly in regard to their own employment, they become more circumspect, and whilst still articulating sympathy and support for disabled people, their answers are more caveated and inclined to require disabled people to fit into work. There is also a theme around suspicion, including concerns that in some way 'non-genuine' disabled people will be proffered undue advantage over their non-disabled colleagues. Indeed, a characteristic anxiety was that adopting a positive approach to disability will be seen to be discriminatory against non-disabled workers, which transgresses their notions of fairness and reasonableness. Hence, whilst there is an overtly positive approach to disability, there is also a sense of ambivalence about disability, a theme that is further explored in the assumption analysis.

## **Assumption analysis**

The assumption analysis was carried out as outlined in chapter four. In this analysis the objective was to identify the inherent assumptions the interviewees appear to hold over a range of issues. Within this analysis the staff groups were considered as a whole, rather than in the specific staff groups. When this was done the apparent

assumptions inherent to the responses appeared to fall into six main themes. These were assumptions about disabled people, how people respond to disabled people, work, accommodating disabled people in work, the company and the management, and the role of government and legislation.

When analysing the assumptions, the common ideas that emerged were obviously not universally held, and there were always dissenting views from the majority viewpoints, but fairly consistent and widely held ideas were apparent. It is also the case that assumptions can be contradictory, which may or may not be recognised by individuals.

### ***Assumptions about disabled people***

Disabled people were assumed to be inherently limited, slow and less able than other people. This analysis from a senior female board member suggests their beliefs on equality over gender are not extended to that of disability:

Evidence. I'm an ex-scientist you see, I'd be looking for evidence based justification, so it's my right as female to be paid the same as men, yeah, I would like to provide scientific evidence why I can do this job as well as a bloke, you know, so it would be evidence based.

*Could you see any problems with disabled people with that approach.*

Yes, probably, probably, and probably when benchmarking against able-bodied people, yes I would imagine so. Quite significantly so.

(Martha: Operational Board)

The able-bodied norm is evident in the above comment, demonstrating something that was commonly held. What was generally expressed alongside the negative thinking over capability was the assumption disabled people may have low self-esteem, and a negative view of their own ability.

'.. so I guess there's the physical side to, or the mental side as well in terms of maybe them feeling they're not as capable in one sense..'

(Brian: Frontline Worker)

Disabled people were seen as being in an unfair situation through no fault of their own, and therefore when in work should be respected for being there (even if they are not as 'able' as others), and can offer something of value in work (despite being limited, slow and less able). Linked to these presumed negative self-views it was

assumed that they may hide their disability, and that they may work harder to compensate for their negative view of themselves.

‘...they feel that they need that extra level of support and other people may not want it because they don’t want to be seen or be treated or whatever as, you know, disabled and have that...that highlighted.’

(Carl: Frontline manager)

However, there were also concerns over trustworthiness, in that it was assumed that disabled people can abuse the ‘system’, in some way gaining unfair advantage using their disability.

‘...they’re supposed to do so many baskets an hour, it was like fifty six baskets an hour, something like that, he was only doing twenty four and that’s just him so the other lads had to catch them up, you know, do them for him but they just didn’t like it, but it’s just the way it is, you know, you could only take so much, I don’t know if he was taking the mickey or what... you know, cause he, I don’t think he was, there was anything wrong with him he was just lazy, you know.’ (Tim: Frontline worker)

‘If you’re going to use your disability to claim benefits when you can ably contribute to society, then you shouldn’t do it, it’s just morally wrong isn’t it? Take and take and take and giving nothing back.’

(Trevor: Frontline worker)

The assumptions about disabled people seem to reinforce the notion that disability is to be dreaded; disability was seen to be so limiting and unfair it must follow that self-esteem is eroded.

*‘...what ...problems do you think disabled people face in everyday life?’*

‘Right depends on the degree of disability but huge I would think and not only physical, practical but also mental in terms of self-esteem and self-worth, confidence, a belief that they can achieve something that they could achieve but perhaps they doubt within themselves so, you know, I would imagine it’s a massive disadvantage. (Martin: Operational Board)

‘the classical is Stephen Hawkins, for one. And if he wasn’t...if he didn’t push himself, he would be left to vegetate somewhere I should imagine, in the society we live in at the moment.’ (Trevor: Frontline worker)

The ‘tragedy’ of disability was generally adhered to, underpinning the able-bodied norm that pervades people’s thinking.

'You do charity events because you meet many varieties of people. It's enlightening. It makes you grateful how you actually are yourself sometimes.' (Carl: Frontline manager)

'... some people feel sorry, some people think oh I can't be doing with that it's, you know, too much for them to deal with basically that's why we are in a society now where people are taking their own lives cause they can't live with the disability that they've got, unfortunately, that's where we are. It's bad, really bad. But am I in a position to actually feel like that person.' (Lenny: Frontline Worker)

Overall the general concept people hold around disability seems underpinned by assumptions rooted in the 'tragedy' of disability, in that it is something that cannot be other than negative (and hence to be feared). Implicit to this seems to be clear adherence to the notion of the superiority of the 'normal'.

### ***Assumptions about how people respond to disabled people***

It was assumed that people have a choice over how they respond to disabled people, and that they choose to treat disabled people negatively or heedlessly, as they have a negative view of disabled people. Underpinning this was a strong belief that people do not understand disability, and this makes them uncomfortable, as they are driven by a strong imperative that 'sameness' between people is comfortable.

'... if they don't come across someone who's got a disability everyday they don't really know how to treat them. So they maybe go over... overcompensate for not really knowing what to do with people ... Because you don't want to make them feel as if you don't care that they can't do something. So you want to make sure that they... what's the word...? You're trying to make them comfortable but sometimes in the process you make them uncomfortable.' (Jenny: HR Manager)

'...I think people probably deep down have sort of a...or maybe certainly generations gone by have...some of their basic needs are probably that everybody is the same.' (David: Middle Manager)

It was also assumed that negative behaviour towards disabled people is in some way natural and a product of human nature. However, it was assumed that people can change, and that this change would be best achieved by exposing people to disabled people, which will then in some way produce more positive attitudes.

'... don't think you can compel people to be aware but I think you can do it. I think you can...it can be part of a, you know, the education system, you do it through schools, you do it through, you know, the, you know, all the classes they have now, these ps whatever it is, socials thing.'  
(Mary: HR Manager)

What is striking is the absence of self-blame. Although there was recognition of the poor treatment, attitudinal barriers and inherent unfairness (at least by others), there was no rush to locate fault within themselves. Attitudes can change, but this was about developing familiarity and overcoming discomfort. It was not, it seems, to build self-awareness of collective failing.

'I think all of these things it's ignorance, in terms of, you know, they've, somebody that might do that, you know, I might make excuses in terms of lots of things about educational background but I think it's basically until you've ever had to, you can never be truly informed until you've experienced what that person is going through and such or how they have to live their lives in terms of the challenges they, you know, they have to face on a day to day basis so I think it's ignorance from that perspective that they, they just haven't experienced the same things and as such can't comprehend those things and that's why.' (Philip: Middle Manager)

However, there was also an assumption that disabled people will take advantage, and therefore it was necessary to ensure there is evidence that this is not the case.

'I would say that the DDA is necessary, it's probably abused and I've had experience of issues...of occasions where it's been abused, where people have gone to DDA as an opportunity to go down the legal route.'  
'To what end?'  
'For financial gain in tribunal.' (Philip: HR Manager)

'What you've got to avoid is other people feeling they have been discriminated against because you've got somebody that can't physically do something that's not nice. So the first thing you've got to do is actually establish that that's genuine.' (Clive: Middle Manager)

As discussed above it was assumed that disability is not the 'fault' of disabled people, but likewise it was important for others to know that it was beyond their control. It was also expected that disabled people will work hard, and that they would not work only in extreme circumstances.

Hence there are inherent contradictions and tensions in the viewpoints held that seem linked to how people feel about disabled people. At one end of the spectrum people feel sympathy, and hence disabled people are to be treated with respect for overcoming the difficulties they face in order to work. Accordingly they can be afforded some support in their role. At the other end of the spectrum people feel suspicious, concerned that disabled people may be overstating the impact of their impairment. Hence, given that everyone who can work should work and contribute appropriately, disabled people will be expected to justify their status as disabled. Moreover, to allay suspicions it is necessary for them to demonstrate that they are not using their certificated disabled status to take advantage, such as by working harder.

### ***Assumptions about work***

It was a strong assumption that people must work, and indeed that people generally want to work. When considering roles within work, it was assumed they are fairly fixed in nature, and that it follows that people must then fit into those roles (and indeed into the teams carrying out those roles, and the facilities that work offers around work);

‘We have to be careful, again, that we don’t generalise because different sectors of work can provide opportunities for a whole variety of different disabilities and, you know, if you look at...we fall into manufacturing and wholesaling, wholesale sales, and the problems that people would have with disabilities, in our industry particularly, would be mobility, would be dexterity, the ability to handle safely, under the banner of manual handling, fairly large weights and therefore, it does restrict, I think, those people’s ability to come and work in our type of industry.’ (Tony: HR Manager)

There was a strong sense that generally the work system cannot be readily changed, nor should it be. It was further assumed that people then do fit into roles: this is linked to a strong view that given the range of roles within work, there will be (must be) roles that disabled people can fit into.

‘I am a great believer that there’s a job or something could be done by everybody. Something could be done by everybody, that would not only benefit the country, that would benefit all of us, but it would also benefit the person doing that role, because it would give them a bit more self-esteem wouldn’t it? So yes, I do think everybody should be doing something, yes.’  
(Derek: Frontline worker)

This thinking could be classed as misplaced optimism, in that what people believe seems much more positive than is justified (Krizan and Windschitl 2007). Yet such thinking is perhaps understandable. No-one can know the whole jobs market and every specific role within it, nor can they know every impairment type and the consequences for employment. Hence it is a comforting step to take to assume that within the vast, and to the individual mostly unknown, jobs market there is somewhere a role fitted to the disabled individual. In making this assumption it helps the individual to avoid the uncomfortable step of accepting otherwise that work must change. Rather it is the individual who must look for that role, not the workplace and the workers who must look to change how they do things. It is assumed that fitting the right people into roles is essential: it is accepted that skills, abilities and indeed performance is variable, and as such it is right that people should compete for work roles. 'The best person for the role' is seen as axiomatic. In the comment below there is a hint of surprise at the end, as if somewhat unexpectedly the disabled person might indeed be the best person for the job.

'...so there's more we could do to make it a level playing field as such that any candidate that came for a particular job could, you know, if they were the best candidate in terms of their intellect and experience could actually take that job up with our department.' (Philip: Middle Manager)

### ***Assumptions about accommodating disabled people in work***

When people were challenged over the practicalities and realities of accommodating disabled people within work, two key themes emerged in which there were diverging assumptions. These were firstly the degree of reasonableness and toleration people would show when asked to change how they worked: this was assumed by some to be high, and by others to be low (it should be noted that the confidence people expressed about how reasonable people would be towards disabled people sits uneasily with their previous assumptions that generally people chose to treat disabled people negatively or heedlessly).

'Now if the person happens to be, you know, slightly disabled, for whatever reason then going the extra mile to accommodate them and make them feel involved, part of, to me should be human nature. It should be in our gene to say that's just how we do it.' (John : Middle Manager)

'The team I'm in, I'm sure it would, yeah. I couldn't answer across the board like, you know, there's a lot of shallow minded people about, so I couldn't, I couldn't speak for everybody.' (Edward: Frontline worker)

The second set of assumptions was about the extent to which people should be asked if they would change how they worked (and hence the degree to which their consent was required), as opposed to be instructed to change. Some people assumed co-workers should be asked, others assumed they should be instructed, although this was less common.

'I think, even if there was only one person out of a member of the team that was totally against it, you'd have to sack the idea.' (Bill: Frontline worker)

'If you don't want to change then there's something...you need to be educated as to why. And open your eyes and help people out...work as a team. And if these people are part of your team, then you're going to do things differently to get the maximum efficiency team. If it means doing a bit of extra work, flipping heck, it's better than doing nothing.'

*'So you'd expect people to...'*

'I would, yes. And tell them that's part of the job, part of the contract. If you don't want to do it, door's over there ... in a nice kind of way.' (Trevor: Frontline worker)

Lying within these assumptions were some other significant beliefs, firstly that accommodations for disabled people would be relatively minor and or short term. There is also a strong assumption that people would not agree changes around accommodating disabled people if it affected their remuneration negatively: this was seen as unfair, and it was assumed that any process would have to be fair, however that could be defined.

'So you wouldn't want to put them and a team under pressure because they're a weak link in a situation. So if you are, I don't know, on a car production line and everything's slowing down at this one point and then speeding up afterwards, not the right place to put the person. Because they come under pressure and everyone else just piles that on and the productivity is out and bonuses are going down. So I think you have to... if you do have that situation, work out the best place for them so... or the right place for them to work. And there will be a right place but there will also be a wrong place.' (Jacob: Middle Manager)



When the above themes of toleration and consent are put together, different scenarios can present themselves. One scenario is where it is assumed that staff are generally tolerant, and should be asked to accommodate a disabled worker. This set of assumptions seems the most common, and is seen in the views, for example, of the senior managers and operational board. Anxious not to impose, and confident of the response of staff, this picture of staff responding positively to changing how they work seems the senior staff's preferred option (remembering that changes will be expected to be relatively minor).

'Let's say somebody was blind say, and they came into an office to work, we should as a company, or a business should make sure there are certain things in place for that person to be able to manage, and I'm sure from a point of view of the team, I'm sure the team would want to help that person in the best way they could. As if someone came in who wasn't as good as making a brew as somebody else, there shouldn't be that kind of environment. But that's up to the team to make that happen.'  
(Neil: Middle manager)

Another scenario, coming mainly from the frontline staff, is based on assumption that staff would be intolerant of change. This is articulated by one staff member when considering their potential response to being asked to change how they worked in order to accommodate a disabled colleague;

'No.'  
'Never?'  
'Well it depends what you mean by adjust their job?'  
'*Okay that's fair comment...*'  
'If me and you worked side by side and you're disabled, I wouldn't expect to do... have to do anything more out of my work... normal work role to assist you than what I should have to do. Fair enough if there's the odd occasion summat crops up again you're in the wheelchair and you need that book off the top shelf, can you get us that book please? Yes. In the long term I'd look at why is the book on the top shelf if you're going to be using it, it should be down here.'  
'*Good point yes.*'  
'So yes and no in that sense. If we were working side by side like I say, I would expect you to be able to do that job. You've been employed to do that job, it's been assessed that yes that okay even though you might have a disability you are fully capable of doing that job. So am I sat next to you doing the same job without a disability.' (Derek: Frontline worker)

Bearing in mind that this is about how people felt things should happen (there was very little evidence presented that people have actually engaged in negotiating

workplace accommodations of this kind), it is clear in both scenarios the issue of people's attitudes is central to what might happen.

When considering these scenarios the second theme to consider is around consent from people to change the way they worked. There was strong feeling that people should be asked, and, if need be, educated with the aim of securing their agreement. Whilst many people assumed staff would be willing to change, when asked about the possibility of intolerant staff there was a marked reluctance to deal with potential consequence, that of them refusing to agree to any changes. The assumption seemed to be that there would be some way of sorting it out: as one frontline worker explained it when asked about how to respond to someone who was refusing to change;

'Yeah. I think, in a situation like that, the person who's not all that happy with it should be interviewed about it, assessed about it. Find out what he's not happy about, and we'll see if we can find a middle ground, because you don't want to be losing a good person like that who's obviously part of the team and knows the job, if he's not feeling all that happy about it. I'm sure a good firm and a good management team should be able to get round something like that.' (Bill: Frontline worker)

The alternative assumption that staff should be instructed was far less common. The dilemmas faced over this issue are encapsulated in two comments by a frontline manager when considering how to approach accommodations and the impact on other staff:

'I think it depends on the person, I think I could take you downstairs and give you five or six people... who would openly accept and readily, you know, assist, but I think you'll get other people who, who just want to come to work, go home and whatever happens in between they are not, they are not really interested and they will quote you chapter and verse, that is not my job, that's not in my role profile..'

'We'd have to sit down and discuss it with them and consult with them because obviously they'd have to express their concerns and their views and we'd have to, well, put guarantees in place that it wouldn't impact on them directly because you will get people that will say well I'm not prepared to do more work because of another person's disabilities.'

(Paul: Frontline Manager)

Paul is clear that there are willing and unwilling staff, but also that there should be consultation. This assumption that there is some degree of consent required,

(otherwise why the need for consultation), adds to the sense that the onus is on the staff teams. As has been discussed, people have a very strong theme around reasonableness, but defining the extent of reasonableness is something people struggled with. But in a sense this approach offers a solution, as reasonableness will be defined by the staff and their response. What they are prepared to see as reasonable then becomes the defined degree of reasonableness: it is not then defined by what the organisation requires. It is a logical but circular and self-serving argument. The staff are assumed to be reasonable, and hence how they respond will be reasonable. If they feel what is being asked of them is unreasonable, that must be the case. The notion that the underlying driver of how to respond to the demands of disability is the willingness of staff to accept them is highlighted in the explanation of one frontline staff member who acknowledges the capacity of co-workers to undermine disabled staff, but then neatly passes the responsibility to the managers.

‘Cos, you know, what, if the managers can manage their teams but they can’t influence their behaviour and they can’t necessarily influence the, their previous experience, I think making, I mean to, sorry, that’s probably wrong, they can’t influence their attitudes. They can probably influence their behaviour because they can stop them from shouting, they can stop them from saying certain things or doing certain things, but in terms of their attitudes they can’t change them. So I think that’s the bigger problem. I think you could, you could have disabled or impaired people doing roles, but you couldn’t affect the other people’s behaviours and I’m not sure how you would sort that team dynamic out really. It would have to be, you know, facilitated by managers in terms of well, you know, this person is as able as you to do a particular role and that’s why they’ve been employed, you know, it’s, and we should make the best effort to, to get them in.’ (Brian: Frontline worker)

A similar pattern emerges regarding assumptions underpinning the approach to sickness management and disability, in that two themes emerged with divergent assumptions within them. The first was concerning the degree to which discretion should be applied within the process. Some people assumed there was or should be a wide range of discretion in dealing with disabled people, others that there should be no discretion.

‘Because I don't believe a company would feel comfortable enough dismissing a disabled person the same way you'd dismiss an able bodied person that was off on sickness.’ (Sarah: HR Lead, Operational Board)

'...then I don't think it would be fair, to be honest, to allow a so-called disabled person, additional days sick compared to an able bodied person.'  
(Sam: Frontline worker)

This second comment is a good example of the sense of suspicion carried by staff. Sam is not necessarily categorising all disabled people as in some way false, but elsewhere he displays a similar (and not uncommon) ambivalence, in this case sounding slightly grudging that someone was undeniably disabled;

'Well, you have to take people at face value, and obviously I didn't think he was exaggerating his situation, but yes, as it happened that person was actually in a wheelchair, but we were at the time only carrying out office duties; we were answering the phone et cetera, so he was perfectly within his capabilities.'  
(Sam: Frontline worker)

This highlights the second assumption, that around the genuineness of disability: some people assumed that disabled people would genuinely need time off, whilst others assumed they could misrepresent their position in order to take advantage of the system. A strong assumption linked to this area was that to treat disabled people differently was in some way to discriminate (or at least to be seen to discriminate) against able-bodied people, which was seen as unfair and to be avoided.

'But from the worker, you've got to be mindful that just because you're disabled doesn't give you the right to give you preferential absenteeism.'  
(Jack: Middle Manager)

'And again, there's people here who are off all the time, and you think, 'He's never in him! How does he get away with it?' Because...yes, it's a difficult situation what we're doing. If someone here were off all the time I think they'd...we work a system here where you have three times off in a year, you're onto a stage 1. If you have another one it goes up like that, and eventually they put you out of the system, after you're on stage 3. I think with certain things, if you have got problems, like you were really ill, they'd help you out, they'd go as far as they could, but I don't know how far it would go before they said, 'Look, we can't carry on paying you because...'  
*'And do think it's a fair system, that?'*

'It's harsh if you're ill isn't it? If you're really...if you've got real problems, if you've got real disabilities...like I say, it's a harsh way of getting rid of someone but...if you were just ill all the time because you got up in the morning and didn't feel so good and that were...yes, manage them out of the system. I've come in feeling half dead some days but I knew I couldn't have the day off, so I've come in, but if you're ill, yes, I think it's harsh, yes, if there's something wrong with you.'

*'Okay.'*

'I wouldn't like to see anyone sacked.'  
(Jim : Frontline Worker)

Jim's response encapsulates much of the conflicted thinking people present. He sees a need to deal with people who are absent, but recognises at the same time the implications for the genuinely ill person. Whether his insistence in coming into work when not well is from a fear of the consequences or a desire not to be acting as those he clearly disapproves of is not clear. But his last plea around not wanting to see people sacked is clearly at odds with his earlier comments, and yet it is not difficult to see a possible explanation. His real desire is to see an end to people abusing the system, leaving the way open to show latitude to the genuinely ill. The harshness he perceives is a result of the behaviour of a few.

As before, when looking at these themes it is possible to identify different scenarios, one being to assume that discretion would be used, and that disabled people will present with genuine requirements under the process. This can be seen as acting appropriately, although the discomfort of dealing with non-disabled people differently will remain, as can be heard from this slightly agonised snippet from a longer discussion on trying to get the right approach to sickness and disability.

'Yeah. I mean I think we'd always try and manage it sort of sensitively because um I think evidence would say that we probably would make some allowances for the fact that we recognise there's a disability there. Whether that's right or wrong, you could probably argue about...given like a lot of the things we've gone through, this is consistency and stuff like that, that we probably would make some form of allowances.' (Jonathan: Operational Board)

An alternative scenario is that discretion is being used when people are not genuinely in need of such consideration, and in doing so people are being allowed to get away with playing the system to their advantage. When adopting the position of allowing no discretion to be used, instead adhering rigidly to the requirements of the process, there then arises anxiety about those disabled people who are assumed to be genuinely in need. This anxiety will be about seeming harsh, or indeed in breach of the legislation. But then there is the alternative, where they are not seen as genuine, the implication being that the process is being used as it should, and hence is fair. These anxieties are highlighted in the following comments;

'...it's a tricky question; but in a factory you're always going to get a lot of people that are off for no particular reason, basically just because they can't be bothered coming in. But the genuine ones, you all get tarred, you know, with the same brush, kind of thing.' (Edward: Frontline Worker)

'The same as everybody else. That's a management thing, though. That's not for me to say, but that's a management thing. If I was off sick and I couldn't do my job, then I know the management would turn round after a certain amount of time and say "you're contracted to be here, if you can't do the job, blah, blah, blah. We're sorry but we need to let you go". I don't think they should be looked at in any other light than they're an able-bodied person, or a disabled person in an able-bodied's job. So, they should be treated just the same.'

*'Right, you wouldn't expect any special discretion or anything like that?'*

'Well, if I saw there was any extra, then I'd think "if something happens to me, then I'd want the firm to do the same for me". Just because they're disabled and the firm's given them a bit of leeway for whatever reason, they're off sick, they can't do the job. Maybe, if they come back, light duties, whatever. But I would expect the same response if something like that happened to me, because I would not want to be discriminated against.' (Bill: Frontline Worker)

The importance of this element of the analysis is the way in which it demonstrates the competing ideas people hold that can cause conflict in their thinking, whether it is about accommodations or about sickness management. People both want to show tolerance and discretion and yet hold fast to procedure and a desire to achieve the same outcomes for all. They want to see staff as reasonable and willing, and yet are suspicious of disabled people. This seems indicative of a fundamental challenge, which is that there is not a clearly understood and held rationale for how to approach disability. In turn this echoes the dilemma of difference and the conundrum of needing to both recognise and set aside differences. In many ways the staff would be happy to treat everyone, including disabled workers, in the same manner. Treating disabled people differently causes discomfort, even when the disadvantage disabled people face is recognised. It appears that staff remain unclear as to why it is justified to treat people differently. This may seem contradictory, given the way in which disability is treated sympathetically, but when it comes to work staff are clear that work is competitive. People should obtain work because they are the best person for that role, with strong emphasis on ensuring that disabled people are in the right role for them. As discussed previously the feedback over the management scenario involving the

person with a speech impediment demonstrates this, with repeated concerns expressed over the suitability of someone for such a role.

'Mm. Yeah, I suppose it's...if they're in customer response, I suppose there's a worry over that type of thing, is that a worry that they're in the right...or they've been recruited into the right role, for a start'

(Jonathan: Operational Board)

Hence to offer some people a different approach that accommodates their individual need is to in some way contradict the established principles around competitive work. This seems to track back to the grounding of disability in the individual rather than in society: it is unfortunate for the individual to be burdened with their impairment, but in the competitive labour market there is a reluctance to compensate (at least not greatly) for this misfortune. Perhaps this sheds light on a yet more fundamental fear, that of the loss of opportunity and advantage for non-disabled people. One area of very high agreement was the rejection of differential remuneration for disabled people. Whilst this could be read as a defence of the equal worth of disabled people, it could also indicate a nervousness of establishing a principle of differential pay linked to performance and capability. Such a principle could then be applied to other staff. As seen in the comment below, the idea of disabled workers can be seen to very unsettling

'It's like...everything would be different, because obviously if you've got somebody who's not working the same...in one way, if you pay them less you're discriminating against him, but if you pay him the same amount as everyone else, you're discriminating against everyone else, because they're doing more work and getting less pay, so...either way you look at it, it's two sides of a coin, you're discriminating one person against the other.'

(Jim: Frontline worker)

Not disturbing the status quo, expressed frequently as a concern about discriminating against non-disabled people, was a caveat applied to many of the ideas expressed around how to approach disabled people and work. Whether it is around accommodating disabled people, or offering them differential treatment under the sickness absence procedure, the assumptions people hold seem indicative of a deeper confusion and anxiety over how to deal with the disabled 'Other' in the workplace.

### ***Assumptions about the company and the management***

From the interviews it appeared there were various assumptions at work about Breadco and its management, such as the centrality of its values, its need to expand and its need to be profitable. However, what was also of interest were the assumptions that people had about companies and managers in general. There was a clear assumption that companies chose how they behaved (and therefore could change their behaviour) linked to their values.

'I guess safety would be an issue, or obviously any employer would need to consider very carefully about the safety aspects of the individual in terms of their disability.' (David: Middle manager)

'Yeah, I mean, there must be an element of discrimination still appears I imagine at times, as I say, large companies I'm sure will have policies and try and follow them.' (Jonathan: Operational Board)

As the above comments also demonstrate it was assumed that managers had the right and the responsibility to exercise choice when recruiting people. This should be based on the right person for the role, and that it was reasonable for any employer to select people on merit.

'I don't think you should have like a quota of "you need to have so many people with disability, therefore"...whether that's like a disability, or whatever it is, but I don't think you should have a target or anything like that.'

*'Why is that? Why not have that then?'*

'Because then you're not recruiting on merit, you're recruiting to a target.'  
(Keith: Frontline Manager)

Overall it was assumed that the approach a company had was a reflection of its loyalties: in the case of Breadco this was a reflection of its 'family values' that showed a high degree of loyalty to staff, whereas it was assumed that other companies might operate on other loyalties, such as short term profit or the share price.

When considering these assumptions, it might seem unsurprising that people assumed that companies had the right to choose who they employ, and indeed this was not questioned within the whole staff group. But it is interesting to then link it to earlier assumptions about expecting people to fit in, and the need to ask staff about accommodations. The expectation is that the organisation will choose the right person;



this seems in line with people's sense of fairness, which in a competitive labour market means the person with the most merit getting the job. Distorting this, even for the commendable reason of providing disabled people with greater opportunity, is seen as unacceptable, undermining the expectation that the employer's right to choose will be exercised appropriately.

***Assumptions about the role of government and legislation.***

A common assumption was that there was a role for government in the area of disability and employment. There was a general assumption that the role of the state was to in some way even things up, which in itself was based on the assumption that accommodating disability had an impact on competitiveness. This impact was seen as unsustainable or unfair, and hence the government had a role in using funding to resolve this. It was seen that generally external regulation was needed to counteract human nature and the problems this creates, as well as the failure of people to meet their obligations. But alongside this was an assumption that it is not right to force changes, and that any approach must be reasonable. Included in this was the idea that there was a limit to any approach, although it was accepted that external support and guidance is justifiable as this is a difficult area.

'I mean our managing director has got a physical disability and he's the managing director. You know? Does that impact on anything he does? No it doesn't. Is he quite... he's a very, very, very good managing director, and he's actually reached his potential. Now obviously through his life he's had the opportunity to do that, through his family and family circumstances and everything else, but rather than force employers to... I think the thing is the balance would be to get just a natural slot in whatever somebody does, whether they're disabled or not. Look at the person and not the disability kind of thing, would be my view.' (Clive: Middle Manager)<sup>27</sup>

'I think they should look into it. If they're making some sort of legislation to give people that help to get a job, then they should go halfway and say "okay, we understand your point, the bloke, or the girl, is good at the job that you want in that particular field and you want to do that for that person, we'll have a look at it.'" (Bill: Frontline Worker)

Interestingly one frequent assumption was that the previous quota system for disabled people was still in operation, and was seen as a reasonable approach: however it was

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<sup>27</sup> This reference to the manager director being a disabled person was not unique, but it was not common. It was not something he alluded to in anyway during his interview, and in line with the agreed protocol it was not raised with him.

also seen that creating opportunities for disabled people was not really the role of employers.

When considered overall there is a degree of logic to how the assumptions link together. The starting point is the generally negative assumptions about disability, and the impact on the individual. Given that there is little credence given to the idea that the problems disabled people face are rooted in the way non-disabled people behave and hence construct society, it is seen that to be disabled is not fair. But this unfairness is that of bad luck, hence it logical to be sympathetic and be positive in general about disabled people. But the concept of fairness in the working environment is also rooted in the competitive nature of work, and the need to ensure that generally people are dealt with on the basis of the best person (or at least the right person) for the job. Challenges to this, whether real or imagined, are discomfoting, not least if it comes from people who either will embody the dread of impairment that people feel, or who actually lack the authenticity of genuine need and are taking advantage of the goodwill of others. Regardless of the sympathy felt for the plight of disabled people, the tendency is to rationalise the current arrangements as appropriate. The problem of disability remains within the individual, not within the working environment.

Having considered the assumptions at work within the whole staff group the next stage of the analysis is to draw the findings together using the analytical framework.

## **Framework analysis**

Having analysed the material in terms of both themes and assumptions, the next stage of the analysis is to utilise the rationality framework developed in chapter three (which is set out again in fig 11). The approach is to bring together the outcomes of the analysis so far, and consider them in relation to the framework. This can be done to gain further insights around understanding how the staff groups operate, both in terms of their perception of the 'as-is', and the 'ought-to-be'. This is in line with the normative nature of the framework, in that it is concerned with both how people

	Company		
Management	<p>Focus on productivity and competitiveness</p> <p>Disability seen sympathetically as a burden that threatens competitiveness</p> <p>Support provided as welfare as a moral duty</p> <p>Rationality : COMPETITIVE : DISABILITY SEEN AS A BURDEN</p>	<p>Focus on productivity and competitiveness and equality.</p> <p>Disability seen negatively as a risk due to requirements of external legislation and policy : anti-discriminatory processes in place to support representative workforce</p> <p>Support provided to avoid costs of legal action</p> <p>Rationality : DEFENSIVE: DISABILITY SEEN AS A RISK</p>	Legislation/Policy
	<p>Focus on accessibility and diversity</p> <p>Disability seen positively as adding value: diversity processes in place to support equal workforce.</p> <p>Support provided as a business case to maximise added value</p> <p>Rationality : DIVERSITY : DISABILITY SEEN AS ADDING VALUE</p>	<p>Focus on accessibility and equality.</p> <p>Disability seen empathetically as socially created oppression</p> <p>Support provided as a civil right to compensate for barriers in the workplace.</p> <p>Rationality : SUPPORTIVE : DISABILITY SEEN AS SOCIALLY CREATED</p>	
	Individual		

Fig 11 : Rationality Framework

rationalise what the current situation entails, and also how they rationalise what ought to be the situation. In doing this the objective is to use it to gain further insights from the research material. In doing so it should be possible to evaluate the usefulness of framework in reflecting the rationality displayed by the staff groups. To do this the analysis will consider what the 'as-is' rationality of the staff groups, drawing this out from the thematic and assumption analyses. Then it will consider the 'ought-to-be', and then what may be involved in moving from the 'as-is' to the ought-to-be'.

### ***'As-is' analysis***

Looking overall at the analysis it points strongly to the 'as-is' rationality being defined as competitive, regarding disability as a burden (top left quadrant). This quadrant is characterised by a number of elements, these being a focus on productivity and competitiveness; disability being seen both sympathetically and as a burden that threatens competitiveness; and where support is provided as welfare as a moral duty. Bringing together the insights drawn from the thematic and assumption analyses it is possible to explore in more detail how staff groups identify clearly with this rationality.

In regard to the focus on productivity, this is strongly emphasised throughout. Whilst there is sympathy shown for disabled people and their 'plight', this is balanced very clearly against commercial imperatives that have to be met, and the need for staff to be productive. This is not simply emphasised by the repeated references to productivity, competitiveness and commercial imperatives across the interviews, but also by specific issues that come out of each analysis. The thematic analysis identified the strong theme around the best person for the job within the context of work being competitive. This was further emphasised by such points as the anxieties expressed over the potential decline in disabled people's work capabilities, and the notion that there is no realistic role in the production line for disabled people. The thematic analysis brings out a clear sense that productivity is central, and any threats to it in the eyes of the staff and managers are serious issues. As discussed in the thematic analysis, whilst variation in individual productivity can be accommodated, it has to be 'reasonable', and there is no evidence of any wider toleration for disabled people. As has been argued, this seems to point to an anxiety over any formal procedure that may legitimise variable productivity.

The thematic analysis also brought out strongly the sense that smaller companies could not readily bear the burden of disability, the inference then being the impact on cost and productivity in a commercial setting. It is interesting to note the view that generally the cooperation of non-disabled staff should be sought in any accommodation of disabled staff, and that they should not be compelled to change. Alongside this there is the key point from the assumption analysis that work roles were in some way fixed and disabled workers would need to fit into them. This seems to indicate a general reluctance to disturb the working arrangements of the non-disabled staff, and the risks that doing so might pose to productivity. Overall there is a general emphasis on the centrality of productivity within the workplace, which creates a lens through which issues around disability must be seen.

In terms of disability being seen sympathetically, the thematic analysis brings out a strong sense of sympathy for disabled people, leading to a respect for them being in work, as if this is somewhat implausible. However, whilst this sentiment exists, it is counterbalanced by the emphasis that disability is not seen as a special case, and instead should be incorporated into the general approach to supporting workers. Sympathy goes so far, but there is no particular sense that the sympathy felt should lead to major concessions or changes, the limits set by 'reasonableness' however that is defined. This sympathy is rooted in the theme that disability is an inherently limiting matter that can only be seen as difficult. This is sympathy that emanates from a sense that disabled people are the victims of tragic bad luck, rather than sorrow at the fundamentally wrong way that society treats them. This seems an important distinction, not only as it illustrates that people do not generally acknowledge the social model basis for disability, but it also links to an outcome of the assumption analysis, that of the superiority of the abled-bodied norm. Hence negative behaviour towards disabled people, whilst seen as unattractive, is assumed to be a natural product of human nature.

This issue of where the 'fault' for disability lies seems crucial, as it links to a value people hold that runs through the thematic analysis, that of fairness. What is clearly expressed is the value of treating people fairly. What this means, however, is not straightforward. One thing it does not mean is any form of positive discrimination in

favour of disabled people within the workplace, a view emphatically expressed within the thematic analysis. Rather they are to be treated broadly the same as other people, and whilst there may be flexibility in how processes are applied to them, the outcomes would hence broadly be the same. From the assumption analysis it is clear that there is a fear that such positive discrimination would pose a potential threat to the opportunities for non-disabled people. For all the sympathy expressed in regard to disabled people, there is self-interest at work. It is also the case that within the thematic analysis fairness is cast in terms of the workforce reflecting the local community. However, this needs to be set against the fact that disabled people are generally seen as less able and less productive. Hence sympathy may be the initial reaction of people looking at people they hold as less fortunate than themselves, but this is then tempered by the practicalities of productive work, within which disability is then seen as a burden that threatens competitiveness.

The notion that disability is a burden that threatens competitiveness is expressed in the thematic analysis in a number of ways, not least the issues of productivity discussed above. But alongside this there is a strong theme expressing concern over the impact of disabled people in various ways, including impact on their co-workers. Whilst there are many references to people needing to 'add value', the assumption analysis draws out ideas around job roles being fixed, and people needing then to fit into them, in order to add value. There are significant concerns about the capacity of disabled people to fit into certain roles, and no sense at all that disability in the workplace is a socially created phenomenon due to the way work is constructed. People need to fit in, and whilst there can be some accommodation, it will need to be minimal, and not interfere in the general delivery of the role. Hence the theme that emerges strongly over the need for 'the best person for the job'. This can then be linked to the assumption that the way in which disabled people are seen as less capable could then reduce their own self-esteem. There is strong evidence that making considerable effort to accommodate existing staff who become disabled is acceptable, but much of this is about finding alternative roles where they can still add value, and is a facility not readily extended to prospective staff. Indeed, for new staff the requirement is for them to show that they can fulfil any role they seek in terms of skills, drive and capability. It is assumed that it is right that people compete for roles, and decision

making should be then driven by 'the best person for the job'. Whilst this is a strong theme, there is recognition alongside that in some ways disabled people should be supported, but this comes over a form of welfare provided as a moral duty.

Whilst the notion of welfare for disabled people in the community is acknowledged, support within the workplace is not described in such terms. Generally, as has been noted, the thematic analysis identifies that support is seen as being reasonable if it is within the general scheme of support for staff, although it is accepted it may take different forms. But a strongly moralistic tone is displayed by the staff groups, which is rooted in a number of key ideas drawn out from the thematic analysis. Firstly disability been seen as unfair, and not hence not the 'fault' of the person concerned. This offers some explanation on emphasis on making considerable efforts for existing staff who become disabled; the sense being that this is appropriate due to their loyalty and service. The next key idea is an absence from the analysis, the absence of any real sense that disability lies anywhere outside the individual, and certainly is not a socially created phenomenon. Disabled people are seen as victims of their impairments, to be admired and respected for working despite their difficulties. However, the next key idea, which provides the moralistic overtone, is that if disability is to be accepted it must be genuine, accompanied by a tendency towards suspicion, and indeed judgement on those seen responsible for their own disability. The assumption analysis identifies a clear assumption that people can and will abuse disability status, inferring the need for vigilance. This use of a deserving/undeserving framework seems indicative of an underlying sense that disabled people can be supported if they deserve it, but only because it is granted to them by the rest of the social actors. Whilst there are relatively few overt references to moral duty, the undoubted sensitivity (if not social awkwardness) apparent in the thematic analysis around disability betrays an anxiety to do the 'right thing' even if that may be challenging to what may be preferable in terms of organisational imperatives.

This overall picture seems to go across all the staff groups. There does appear to be some variation when considering the HR staff group, who tend more towards the top right hand quadrant, characterised as defensive where disability is seen as a risk. They have a clearer focus on equal opportunity approaches, and the need to adhere to

process in order to avoid risk. However, they are also very clear that any approach must be reasonable, and support the fundamental commercial requirements of the firm. What is also clear that none of the staff groups, including the HR group, gave any real credence to the idea of diversity, that is seeing disability as adding value. At best people believed that within the wide range of job roles they saw as existing there will be roles suitable for disabled people in which they can function well. But there is no sense that in some way having disabled people in the workforce creates any kind of competitive advantage that otherwise would be lost.

### ***'Ought-to-be' analysis***

As has been stated previously, the response of the staff groups is one of seeming ambivalence. It can be argued that this is a product of the staff groups holding an 'as-is' rationality that sees disability as a burden, whilst at the same time wanting to hold to a general view that more should be done to support disabled people and a sense that they are unfairly treated. Within the thematic analysis this 'ought-to-be' is expressed in general terms along the lines that that disabled people should be in the workplace, should be supported to fulfil a valued role and should be accepted within teams. This would seem to align with the quadrant described as supportive, where disability is seen as socially created, and is characterised by a focus on accessibility and equality, and where support provided as a civil right to compensate for barriers in the workplace. Whilst it is tempting to simply categorise this as wishful thinking, it seems inappropriate to make such a presumption. Rather it seems appropriate to utilise the thematic and assumption analyses to review the attitudes and assumptions of the staff groups in order to seek clarity over the apparent disconnect between the general positive intention of people and their specific views on how to respond to disabled people, a disconnect that seems a cause of tension in their overall rationality. This will be done by considering the specific characteristics within the supportive quadrant in turn.

The first characteristic is a focus on accessibility and equality. The thematic analysis identifies some emphasis on improving physical access, but this is limited, especially where it could be seen to impinge on the productivity of the workplace. There is also limited emphasis on improving accessibility in terms of attitudes and organisational barriers, and there is no particular enthusiasm for fundamentally remodelling work



and workplaces to make them generally accessible to disabled people. Equality is not really seen in terms of rectifying the unequal position or opportunities of disabled workers, but rather about having equal procedures and outcomes, an approach that links to people demonstrating little support for substantially different approaches in order to fully accommodate the impact of disability. Managers are aware of the variations between staff, and the need to manage these. But they seem nervous of the additional challenges they may face managing disabled staff (whether these be real or not), not least in regard to the issue of fairness articulated across the whole staff group. Pauwe and Boselie (2005:72) emphasise the need for organisations to consider the 'concept of fairness' that stems from the moral values employees hold. They highlight the risk that if the relationship between employer and employee is not appropriately balanced this may generate feelings of exploitation that could then erode commitment. Such anxieties chime well with this research, in that it shows that people may be quite well disposed to move to a rationality that is more supportive of disabled workers, but they need their concerns about doing so to be addressed. Hence acting fairly and reasonably are key issues for staff and managers. Whilst the whole staff group might in general terms sympathise with disabled people and opine that employers, (more specifically other employers) treat disabled people unfairly, they are conflicted in how they try to accommodate disability into their concept of work. They then seek to rationalise an approach that takes into account these unrecognised conflicts. This is not to suggest that individuals are disingenuous or deliberately deceptive, but rather are struggling to accommodate their different ideas about work and disability.

The second characteristic of the supportive quadrant is disability being seen empathetically as socially created oppression. Whilst there is some recognition in the thematic analysis of the general barriers disabled people face, there is very little sense that people accept that the root of the experience is socially created. There may be anxieties about how disabled people might fit socially into work, but these anxieties are not accompanied by assertions that non-disabled people are the root of the problem and must change. Whilst there is strong in-principle support for an anti-discriminatory ethos, it is based on an equal opportunities approach which places emphasis on people being both correct for the role, and the best person for the job.

Underpinning this is the notion that work is competitive, and that the employer holds the right to choose freely whom they wish to employ. Employers are seen as jealously guarding their right to choose who they employ, a stance that is seen as reasonable, taking on whoever they deem as the best choice for them. To re-quote one manager when considering the recruitment of disabled people;

‘I think if, you know, if I’m being honest, I would imagine that there’s a view that people would find it a bit of a hassle...’ (Front-line manager)

This issue of freedom to act within business does seem to be crucial. Staff recognise that greater integration of disabled people into the workforce brings wider benefits for society and disabled people, but they balance this against what they see as the necessity for firms to operate freely in the competitive market. They recognise this balance, but they are unclear how it can be balanced in reality. This in some ways encapsulates the dilemma faced, that whilst people aspire to find a solution, they struggle to find one that in some way satisfies the various competing factors they recognise as significant.

The last characteristic is seeing support as a civil right to compensate for the barriers in the workplace. The staff groups accepted that support should be offered if a firm is to be seen to be acting reasonably towards disabled people, but is more the preserve of larger firms who have the resources and capacity to do this. Offering it out as a right, unless universally offered and adhered to, is seen as inherently unreasonable. But the implication of providing support is that some people, classed as disabled, will then receive support not offered to the wider cohort of workers. This then leads to the issue of where support is to come from, which the study group saw as either the company or the state. Whilst disabled people have argued persuasively that they are the best judges of their need for support it does seem unconceivable that the resources of the state will be distributed without there being some process of validation and monitoring to ensure they have been used correctly and effectively (Stone, 1984). It seems equally unlikely that commercial sector organisations, with their appetite for understanding the costs of what they do, would be any less interested in ensuring support was appropriately and effectively utilised. Unpalatable though this may be to disabled people, the nature of someone’s impairment and their consequent support requirements would need to be weighed against what the state or

the company thinks is reasonable to provide. Whilst the study showed that generally people were unable to articulate how to measure reasonable levels of support, there was a very strong sense that there would be a reasonable limit. And, as has been argued, reasonableness is something that can be linked to the overall reaction of co-workers and managers. It may not be readily defined or quantified, but reasonableness seems to be something that is readily sensed and appreciated by those involved.

Having considered the characteristics of the supportive quadrant, the initial impression is that there is no real support for the notion to moving to a supportive rationality. However, it would seem unfair to characterise the general response to disabled people in the workforce as insincere. Rather it does appear that as a general idea this 'ought-to-be' is supported, but there is a difficulty in identifying how it could be realised, leading to a certain degree of ambivalence. From the analysis it is possible to draw out a number of barriers that seem central to why people are ambivalent about moving to a supportive rationality. The first is the belief that the need to maintain competitiveness could be undermined by making accommodations to disabled people, which is rooted in the basic notion that disabled people are inherently less capable within the work environment. This links to the next barrier, that of a fear of the impact on staff. Whilst staff are seen as reasonable and well-intentioned, it is not seen as reasonable to expect them to 'carry' disabled people, and that they will be unsettled by any requirement to do so. The third barrier is the assumption that the work system, designed to be competitive and to maximise the productivity of the staff, is fixed, and disabled people should fit into it where most appropriate.

These barriers are underpinned by two central concepts held by the staff, those of fairness and competitiveness. When considering the concept of fairness it is noticeable that people generally consider disabled people as unfairly treated, and seem to hold genuine sympathy for them. However, when they consider it more specifically in relation to their own working environment they became more conditional and circumspect, disability being seen to threaten the essential balance within the workplace, a threat they do not see as applicable to wider society. The fairness they are happy to see within wider society is different to the fairness they expect within the

workplace. Taking a cynical perspective it could be argued that on a wider, theoretical basis people are happy to proclaim the need for equality and access for disabled people, especially as there little requirement on them to have any meaningful interaction with disabled people. But when it comes to the working environment people are focused on the issue of reward and the inherent fairness required from their perspective. And their expectation is that they expect employers to select people 'fairly' in regard to the reward offered based on the current system that tends toward excluding disabled people. But for people to assert otherwise would be for them to accept that the system is inherently unfair, and hence accept responsibility for this. As was seen from the analysis, whilst people are willing to see that in general the position of disabled people is 'unfair', they do not see the problem as lying with themselves, but rather with the 'bad luck' that results in disability.

In terms of competitiveness it can be argued that the root problem lies in the fundamentally individualistic nature of society, and the expectation that when it comes to paid employment the individual is worth their wages. It is therefore acceptable for an individual to be helped and supported, but generally this should only go beyond the 'normal' limits of reasonable support if the individual has shown loyalty and years of input (indeed this is seen as part of the reward deal). If the degree of disability is too severe to allow someone to work (and it was not self-inflicted), then it is okay for them to be supported, but not to the equivalent material extent as someone who is working. The analysis can be drawn out further, but it comes back to one of the central arguments of the social model of disability, which is that the competitive nature of society and business is a root cause of the disadvantage disabled people suffer. The social model may be correct in allocating blame to capitalist competitiveness, but the issue appears not simply to be rooted in organisations, but individual conceptions of competitiveness. Clearly it could be argued that the competitive nature of capitalism at an organisational level has conditioned individuals to adhere to such viewpoints, but the outcome remains. Whilst people may claim they wish to see a socially responsible approach, when it comes to the arena in which people make their living and seek their reward, they display a rationality driven by an adherence to the competitive neo-liberalist norms of society. For people to be able to accept in real terms a shift from the competitive rationality to the supportive

rationality, they would have to overcome their concerns (or perceptions) about the reduced capability of disabled people, the potentially unfair impact on non-disabled people, and the fixed (and hence unaccommodating) work system that is seen as necessary in a competitive environment. If it is the case, then the staff and managers are locked into a rationality that promotes an exclusionary approach to disability, despite their general desire to be more inclusive.

What this highlights is this disconnect between the staff groups general intent that disabled people should be integrated into work (ought-to-be rationality) and their perception of the reality of employing disabled people (as-is rationality) that acts as a barrier to meeting this intent. What this also points to is a key facet to how they conceptualise disability, in that they conceptualise disabled people and disabled workers differentially. This seems central to how the staff rationalise their conflicting ideas about disability and work. To move from being a disabled person into the category of disabled worker requires the individual to enter the employer: employee relationship, and in doing so bring into play the perceptions of fairness that have been shown to be critical to managers and staff. The sympathetic conceptualisation of disability remains the same, but disability is then viewed through the lens of employment that makes very different requirements on the individual. As has been argued, this accepted norm of competitiveness is then applied, underpinned by the idea that in the competitive labour market it is right and proper for employers to choose who they see as the best person for the job. To employ someone using other criteria, or to require other staff to make 'unreasonable' changes in how they work to accommodate them, is to threaten people's notions of fair and reasonable treatment. Whilst people can be comfortable with accommodating the disabled person in ways not offered to their non-disabled counterpart, this is not the case when they become the disabled worker.

In this people may be displaying what has been coined as 'aversive disablism' (Deal, 2007: 97), where the issue is that they 'may not be anti-disabled, but rather pro-non-disabled'. This may be unrecognised by those who hold these views, but it ties in with the general negative perception of disabled workers and the desire to where possible minimise the difference in approach between disabled and non-disabled people. This is not to claim that people's conceptualisation of the disabled worker is necessarily fair

or reasonable. What is being argued is that to assume that the issue is merely one of discriminatory and risk-averse attitudes is an over-simplification. Whilst these are likely to be an element of what goes on, the way people conceptualise the disabled worker gives rise to concerns within the staff groups. For these simply to be ignored would not be rational for an organisation. The next section will consider the implications for organisations in terms of what constitutes rational responses to these issues.

## **Implications for organisations in regard to rational responses to disability**

The analysis of the data has identified the central importance of how people rationalise the concept of disabled people as workers when considering their approach to including them within the workforce. This section will consider the implications for organisations when making rational choices over their approach to disabled workers. For commercial organisations their decision making should prioritise economic performance (Drucker, 2001), and hence when it comes to employing a disabled person it needs to be economically rational for them to make this choice (Blank, 2000). In taking on someone, the employer should ensure that have the right skills and abilities to do the job required of them, as well as displaying the right behaviours in undertaking the role (Torrington et al, 2011). The study group showed that they supported this approach, and indeed it was clear that they considered that the employer should both hold the right to choose who they wanted to work for them, and employ the best person for the job. They conceptualised work as competitive on an individual basis, and that this applied to disabled people as much as anyone else. Their expectation was that within work people must reach an acceptable standard, whether this be described as 'adding value', 'pulling your weight', 'supporting the team' or some other descriptor of adequate job performance.

Making judgements over who is best for a job is central to firms, and management texts abound with advice and guidance on how to best to do this. Making discriminating choices over who to employ and how to manage them is a core task for any organisation, but what this research has identified are specific implications when

this comes to disabled people. That disabled people are seen, rightly or wrongly, as a risk to competitiveness is perhaps not surprising. But what seems of interest is that this view is pervasive throughout the study group. More significantly it seems clear that there are anxieties across the study group over the impact on co-workers. The analysis identified that many people thought that if people had to alter the way they worked in order to accommodate a disabled person, this should happen with their consent. Whether staff and managers recognised this or not, they were in fact advocating that in some way a work team should be given the capacity to determine who should join that team. Such a barrier could not be openly contemplated on the grounds of race or gender, and yet for disability it was held as reasonable practice to consult with co-workers over accommodations. Of course, the riposte to this is a general reliance on the fundamental good nature of workers, who are seen as generally quite capable of the necessary flexibility and goodwill necessary to accommodate disabled people. This optimism seems to have some elements of faith in it as an approach.

This notion of consent should also be set against their concept of reasonableness. As has been argued, when it came to disability managers had great difficulty defining reasonableness in hard terms. But what then emerged was that reasonableness to some extent was defined by what the staff regarded as reasonable. On that basis, what staff expect around disabled workers becomes a driving force around the organisational response. Managers (and staff) were clear that they were driven by the need to ensure a competitive and productive approach, and given the general anxiety over employing disabled people it would be irrational for them to not consider the impacts they imagine would be felt by staff when employing disabled people. Clearly this should be set against the evidence from other studies that indicates that for some disabled people their impairments require little or no accommodation, and they are able to work on an equal footing with other workers. In this scenario the oft-repeated claim that employers are too risk adverse seems appropriate. It is worth acknowledging the point made by Gardiner and Tomlinson (2009:683) in a study of flexible working across organisations, who state that

‘Whilst business case rhetoric around flexibility and diversity was pervasive across the organisations, this analysis suggests that the rhetoric conceals a range of organisational approaches which do not fit neatly within managing diversity, or equal opportunities paradigms.’

They point out that different organisations have different approaches to flexibility overall, and hence this would influence what could be offered to an individual. The study group freely admitted that generally they lacked confidence and knowledge around disability, recognising the tendency then to avoid risk. Certainly their preferred approach was to deal with disability within the normal parameters of flexibility used within the organisation.

But it should also be recognised that there will be others who will need accommodations, support, flexibilities; the range of approaches that can and are used for disabled people. For this group the issue is not one of simple risk aversion by employers, but the wider challenge of assimilating people into the working system who may not be as productive, who may need specific working arrangements and levels of flexibility not afforded other staff, or whose ability to interact with co-workers is itself impeded by their impairment. These issues were clearly articulated within the study group as significant concerns. But the challenge at this point is to understand the basis for providing such significant support and accommodations. It may be acknowledged that supporting disabled people is the 'right' thing to do and that there may be substantial benefits to the individual and to society in them joining the workforce. But such gains do not mean that there is a specific gain to an individual organisation, and potentially there may be some cost. It can be argued that there is often little or no cost involved, but this is not always the situation. Indeed, it is hard to reconcile the general notion of minimal costs with the repeated references to larger organisations being better able to meet the challenges of employing disabled people. And if there is no gain, and possibly some loss to an organisation, then this brings the argument back round to the issue of rationality.

The implications that emerge from this discussion are twofold. The first is that perspectives over what is reasonable is not limited to senior decision makers, but runs across all staff groups, and as such lends legitimacy to how the concerns over employing disabled people are handled. Hence challenging these perspectives would need to be done at all levels, as it would not be rational for managers to pursue different approaches to disabled workers without the support of the staff working for them. The second is that it is not rational to expect organisations to accommodate disabled people without some acknowledgement of the potential cost in some cases.



And again, this would need to be understood at all levels if it is not to be a source of anxiety and conflict.

Clearly this may not be applicable outside this whole staff group, as different organisational cultures may lead to different reactions to disabled workers (Spataro, 2005). However, this study group did not express any overtly hostile reactions to disabled people, and there was a consistent theme across the whole group around the supportive approach to staff in general. Therefore, it seems reasonable to argue that these implications may be applicable across other organisations, particularly in terms of the relevance of how disability is conceptualised throughout the organisation as a significant driver of the organisational and managerial approach to employing disabled workers. Having considered the implications of the research findings for organisations, the next section will consider the implications at a policy level.

## **Implications and possible approaches to policy around disability and employment**

In considering how to respond to this challenge, it is helpful to return to the approach set out by Ulrich, who saw that problems must be 'discovered, unfolded and defined' (Ulrich, 1983: 22). It is clear that the issue of disability and employment is complex, and there is no simple and unarguable solution. The findings from this study have shown how people struggle to find a coherent set of ideas about disability, and that they are in many ways ambivalent. Ulrich's aspiration was to seek rational approaches to social planning, recognising both that people cannot grasp the whole system, and that the sources of knowledge can be deceptive. These latter points seem relevant to the study. A commonly held perspective is that the treatment of disabled people is simply an issue of prejudice, grounded in ignorance, a viewpoint put forward by many of the study group. Indeed for some the solution is the wider exposure of disabled people to non-disabled people, in order to break down this barrier. However, in line with Ulrich's direction to uncover problems, the study findings indicate that the problem is more complex, drawing in how people conceptualise work and fairness. The assumption that the negative conceptualisation that people hold of disability alone represents the totality of the problem is to allow that knowledge to be deceptive. It is

part of the problem, but to see the problem as simply and only one of discrimination, and to not seek to understand the rationality that people hold overall, is to not unfold and define the problem fully.

The general solutions often offered around disability discrimination can seem too general and theoretical, not grounded in the practical day-to-day decision-making within organisations. The championing of the business case for diversity, whose proponents often seem more concerned with the issues of race and gender than disability<sup>28</sup>, clashes with the study findings that indicates that people are motivated more by a moral sense of what is right to do in regard to disabled people, even if this is not overtly stated. It seems close to being glib to assert that businesses will thrive if they embrace employing disabled people when there are obvious concerns embedded in the thinking of those responsible for running businesses. It is a beguiling notion that disability will in some way add value to a business but the findings from this research indicate no great enthusiasm for embracing diversity as a business case. Rather it supports the argument that the business case has run out of steam, with little cause to think that diversity will impact either way on how businesses perform (Kochan et al, 2003).

Likewise, focusing the approach around a legislative framework seems inadequate, the study indicating most people are unconvinced by its effectiveness. Indeed the general viewpoint is that it is inappropriate to force business to comply, the preferred approach around disability being one of encouragement. People expect individuals to strive to show they are the best person for the job, legislation being a tool an individual can utilise balance any unfair treatment they may experience. It is not seen as a weapon to be used to constrain the general freedom of action of business on a wider scale. Of course this may simply reflect the sense that it is just not effective; as Barclay et al (2008) point out introducing legislation will not in itself halt the discrimination that occurs in the work setting. Anti-discriminatory behaviour continues even when such laws are in force. In seeking options for progress, diversity or the use of legislation do not seem to offer a useful starting point.

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<sup>28</sup> For example a study by Krepcio and Cooper (2008) states that in the US too many national retailers have largely ignored the inclusion of disabled people in their diversity efforts.

Nevertheless the intent to improve matters remains, and it seems logical to accept one point as relatively fixed. Whilst most people accept that more can be done to encourage employers to be generally more positive over the issue of disability, it does appear that supply-side measures will remain a significant, if not the most significant, vehicle for change. This certainly appears to be the Government's approach: as the DWP states about the Work Programme;

'The Work Programme provides tailored support for claimants who need more help to undertake active and effective jobseeking. '(Department of Work and Pensions, 2011)

This chimes with the general sense from the research study that the approach to disabled people and employment is and should remain focussed on supply side measures. Hence in any consideration of what can be done to improve matters, ignoring the centrality of supply-side measures seems inappropriate.

Accordingly, what then are the implications for policy development around this area, given the overall view that disabled people should be more integrated into employment than they currently are? As has been argued, organisations will act in ways that seem rational to them. Hence the challenge would be to consider how to convince employers to think differently, given how they conceptualise disability. In doing this it is not intended to offer a detailed set of proposals over policy and system changes that could be undertaken. Rather it is to consider that basic principles that could be adopted to influence changes to policy development.

If employers believe they are being asked to act irrationally, they will need either to be convinced that their concerns over disability are unfounded, or there are other reasons that make it rational to employ disabled people. In dealing with their concerns, it should be accepted such concerns are not entirely unfounded. Disabled people are not an homogenous group, and a particular impairment set against a particular role may or may not constitute a significant issue for an employer. Hence any dialogue with employers over future approaches should openly recognise this dilemma, and accept that some disabled people are not going to be readily and easily accommodated within the workforce. This will be an uncomfortable position, both as it risks employers using

this to reinforce the concept that all disabled people are unaccommodatable, as well as potentially condemning a section of disabled people to a secondary status within society. To counter this there should to be a maturing of the dialogue over disability; for disabled people to participate fully in society clearly some of them will need to be the recipients of welfare as they are unable to participate in any paid work. But it will also include, in effect, those who need 'welfare-in-work', the support they need to participate within the workplace. The neo-liberalist lurch in conceptualising welfare as something that saps society in some way does mean that categorising support around employment as 'welfare' could be demeaning to the dignity of disabled people and could contribute to a sense of secondary status. Yet as Marshall pointed out, the provision of social rights is a mark of a civilised society (Marshall, 1992), and whilst people are suspicious of people who might abuse the provision of welfare they generally accept that disabled people should be readily entitled to reasonable support. It is worth noting that there is evidence that social welfare benefits do not make people lazy, regardless of common perceptions to the contrary (Esser, 2009).

The challenge is to recast the language and debate around this issue so that on the one hand employers can be challenged to recognise that in many cases their fears are unfounded and disabled people can be successfully employed with little or no impact or support, whilst on the other hand acknowledging that this is not a universal position, and employers are entitled to have concerns over the impact of employing some disabled people. A first step could be consideration of how employers could be more formally supported around this issue. Greater and more ready access to advice would seem a sensible facility to offer, as this research shows that managers are not likely to be confident over how to approach specific issues around disability, and firms are unlikely to maintain high levels of competency around disability in all its possible forms. Managers are likely to need support around managing disability, and this should be beyond simple policy advice. It should be support on how to manage the practicalities and impacts of accommodating a disabled person within the working environment: the impact of HR policies on employee attitudes stems from the way in which they are actually put into practice by managers rather than how it was intended they should be used (Kinnie et al, 2005). That said, managers are not always readily helped: as Renwick (2003: 273) points out, managers may recognise that they require

guidance from HR, but can then can be unhappy with what they receive, feeling they are being 'policed by the rule book'. This does lend itself to the idea that what is required is more active advice and intervention rather than simple guidance production.

It may be appropriate to consider how local schemes for bringing together businesses to look at how they can be engaged and supported to think more positively about disability could be developed: one common theme from the research is the belief that for everyone there is a role that suits them 'somewhere out there'. Perhaps a greater emphasis needs to be placed on job matching approaches that actively seek out potential roles for disabled people. Such approaches overall would benefit from a focal point that provided leadership, and in this the potential for this to be a function of local authorities could be considered, given their capacity to act as a lead agency in regard to local economic development (Chandler, 2009). That said, should local authorities be required to take on a leadership role around employment and disabled people, they themselves would need to demonstrate that they were exemplary employers of disabled people.

The research showed clearly the concerns people had over accommodating disabled people within the workplace, as well as general acceptance that disabled people should compete for work alongside everyone else. It follows that disabled people need to be able to present themselves as offering what an employer can confidently accept. In the same way that people are trained and prepared to have the skills to do job roles, so this could apply more directly to disabled people who need accommodations. If people are to be supported through such schemes as Access to Work, then it would seem sensible to have the potential support for someone applying for a work role to be mapped out and agreed in advance, so that the person comes able to offer themselves as a capable worker. This could address some of the anxieties employers may have when considering if they should employ a disabled person. This general principle could be extended further to looking at how disabled people might be assisted to train for roles in a way that builds in accommodations that can be readily understood and undertaken by employers. Employers want to employ people confident that they have the capacity to do the work needed, and simply to see the

attitude of employers as unreasonable when it comes to disability is to fail to recognise the driving rationality behind their decision making. Of course there is a risk to this approach, which is that to signal to employers that someone is disabled may allow them to reject them more readily, and it would have to be the choice of the individual as to how to present themselves.

In considering what reasons could be offered to make it more rational for employers to employ disabled people, it should be recognised that firms do not operate for the good of society, and may well subvert attempts to insist they do so. Firms operate in markets, and the rise in employment rights around personal characteristics, such as disability, have been driven by political mobilisation, and not markets (Piore and Safford, 2006). Generally firms believe that by being profitable they are meeting their social responsibilities (Diener, 2013) but they resent being regulated in order to conform to particular elements of what society may see as 'good'. Hence there will need to be other approaches to simply exhorting firms to change their approach. One option is to adopt a compensatory approach, acknowledging that employing some disabled people, even with support, would not be as productive for the firm as employing other, available people. This approach would require two things, the first being a mechanism for compensation. It seems inevitable that this would be a money based mechanism: possibly employers could be directly compensated for the lost value, or alternatively firms are allowed to pay people reduced rates with the state then topping up the wages of the person concerned. The evidence from the research is that there is great unease over paying disabled people less wages than other workers, and it has also been a repeated theme from various quarters that the loss of benefits when taking on work is a major disincentive (Dutta et al, 2009). Hence any compensatory mechanism should ensure that disabled people received overall the appropriate remuneration for the work role they are taking on, otherwise it would risk being seen as unreasonable. Secondly it would require a mechanism for identifying who was entitled to part of such a compensatory approach, and a method for determining the level of compensation they would attract. And this would highlight a potential area of conflict. The literature review identified the resentment of disabled people over the medicalisation of disability in which they are in some way labelled, diagnosed, measured and generally commoditised as a set of problems rather than a

person who actually knows better than anyone else what their needs are and how they should be met. This research identified the central issue of fairness, and the suspicion people feel over potential abuse of support. Again this seems to require a maturing of the debate over disability; it has been pointed out many times, in order to ensure that disabled people receive the support and recognition they require, they have to be identified and verified by a process that is independent. To reduce unfair discrimination, discrimination in terms of recognising and assessing disability has to be undertaken. It may seem brutal to consider assessing someone as perhaps 50% as productive compared to what could be generally expected in a role. However, within society a great deal of time and effort is spent certificating individuals through a vast range of qualifications in order to categorise people in ways that help identify their employment role. Employers pay people differently because they value them differently, and if employers are to be asked to make a positive choice to take someone who they can fairly regard as less productive than another choice, then issues of value to the employer would need to be faced directly. An open system based on clear principles and rules may also help to allay anxieties of the misuse of the resources involved in any such scheme.

An alternative approach would be to seek employers to take people on as a socially responsible action (Markel and Barclay, 2009). Given that many firms now (at least superficially) embrace corporate social responsibility (CSR), integrating disabled people could be seen as a logical extension of this approach. Again there are some obvious pitfalls to such an approach, not least the risk that employing disabled people will then be seen as marginal activity by a firm, only undertaken if affordable, and thus allowing firms to abdicate any wider responsibility. Also, in adopting such an approach it would be necessary to accept that this was for that group of disabled people for whom competitive employment is not generally realistic. However, one point that has been made repeatedly is that larger firms are seen as more able to take on disabled people, which does tie in with adopting an approach based around CSR.

Another alternative is to require firms to take disabled people on; whilst earlier it was pointed out the general resistance of firms to regulation, nevertheless a compulsory approach could be pursued. Whilst this was not particularly prominent in the research

as an approach, it could address the anxieties over a fair approach within a competitive market. It has been argued that the problem with the previous quota system was not that it was not an appropriate approach, but rather it was never enforced and hence did not work (Barnes and Mercer, 2005). Evidence from Austria suggests that where firms were obliged to recruit disabled people to meet quotas or face penalties, they did indeed employ more disabled workers (Lalivie et al, 2009). However, there is also the risk that if implemented poorly people could fare badly in terms of other work issues such as remuneration or career advancement, creating 'diversity without inclusion'<sup>29</sup> (Bendick et al, 2010:481). Likewise, it needs to be acknowledged that this research did show antipathy to compelling firms to act in particular ways, although people did see a role for the state in this area. Given these anxieties, it could be argued that rather than intervene in the competitive market, the objective should be met through the outworking of the state. This could be done through public services, and that the public services should be set up to absorb the disabled workforce. In certain ways this is already there to a small extent: the equality duties laid upon public services are greater than that of the rest of society (Fredman, 2011). Adopting this as a policy choice has implications, firstly for public services which have long been cast as inefficient and in need of reform, including adopting more business based approaches. Secondly it would risk creating a separation that disabled people have fought against, in that they would be seen as being segregated into public sector work, and then only because they were not seen as fit for the private sector.

Another option when considering how to compel organisations to take on disabled people is to move to creating organisations that can do this. At this point the model could then resemble that previously operated by Remploy, although it needs to be noted that government policy is to reshape Remploy's operations away from this model (Connor, 2010). And it goes without saying that many disabled people would see this as a deeply retrograde step as it would very much lead to segregation. That

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<sup>29</sup> Bendick et al's article is focused on the general principle of diversity, and uses examples to do with race to advance their idea of 'diversity without inclusion', but they are clear that their concept of diversity includes disability. It is interesting that their business case for inclusion requires cultural competence (p282), but makes no mention of accommodations.



said, there are some who argue that specific working environments are the best option for those complex needs (Dempsey and Ford, 2009). However, it has already been noted that disability is complex, with accommodations being impairment specific. This leads to the challenge of how to make workplaces universally accessible. It may be that in order for a workplace for disabled people to work efficiently, such that it could be competitive, it needs to be designed as an impairment specific environment. Such an approach might be better suited to a social enterprise, and the feasibility (and desirability) would need much more work to determine. It has also been argued that it may be appropriate to adopt an approach where differing sectors of business adopt specific approaches to employing disabled people that suit the inherent characteristics of that sector (Clarke et al, 2009).

Overall the ideas outlined above show two themes, firstly that there should be more emphasis on working with businesses to support them in their role as employers, and secondly to create a more organised approach preparing and fitting disabled people into the workplace. The research identified that people operate to a rationality based on how they conceptualise disability within the workplace, and it is tempting to simply suggest that these findings should be incorporated into any future approaches. However, whilst the research did suggest how people conceptualised disability and employment, it also highlighted the tensions and conflicts within people's thinking. What it did not bring out was a rationale for dealing with disability that was clearly acceptable to all stakeholders. Rather is brought into focus points of contention, and the way that people can hold conflicting ideas over disability. Hence, what is being argued is within the debate over disability and employment this issue should be addressed. If the findings of this research are held to be generalisable, then they indicate that there remains a divide between what people within the workplace hold as a reasonable approach, and what the aspirations of disabled people point to. It would suggest that in order that the aspirations both of disabled people and society can be better met, the basis for accommodating disabled people within the workforce needs to be more clearly agreed and articulated. This would point to the need to explore further the basis for government policy making in this area, and how it can influence the approach of employers.

## Chapter six Conclusions

### **Introduction**

This chapter will provide a summary of the research findings. It will identify how the research aims and objectives have been met, and what original contribution to knowledge has been made. It will then outline areas for further research, and consider the limitations on the research, before drawing final conclusions.

### **Summary of research findings**

From the three analyses it is clear that the study group hold conflicted ideas of disability and employment, rooted in different rationalities. In particular their conceptualisation of the disabled worker is different to that of a disabled person. They generally favour the idea of more disabled people within the workplace, but there are barriers to moving to this more supportive approach. Underpinning this conflict are two themes, the first being the competitive nature of work and business, a value that is infused throughout the staff groups, and feeds into the second theme, that of fairness. People's concept of fairness moderates their response to disability, and the expectations of staff over how disabled people should be treated in relation to themselves is central to determining what is a reasonable approach overall. That competitiveness is a key issue is reflected throughout the study, as illustrated by the managing director of Breadco;

' ... we're also a commercial organisation and therefore we have to make sure we bring in the best people and those would, are most capable of doing a particular job...' (Gerry: Operational Board)

The general sentiment around disability is that sympathy, tempered by reasonableness. But this should not be mistaken for unconditional commitment. Indeed Bambra and Smith (2010:80) argue that when it comes to how disabled people are regarded the climate is getting harsher in that;

'In the new politics of welfare, fewer people suffering from ill health or disability will be considered to be 'disabled' and therefore 'deserving' of unconditional state support ...we conclude that in the new politics of the active welfare state, people with a disability or a chronic health condition are no longer considered 'deserving'.

This may seem unduly pessimistic, given that there has been some progress in recognising and responding to the need to make workplaces somewhat more physically accessible. However, this study identified that people think that disabled people should work unless genuinely unable to do so, but that there should not be any positive discrimination in favour of them. They should be competing with everyone else.

Further to this, people generally still act on the tragedy model of disability, regarding accommodations not so much as a right that disabled people must be afforded, but rather as an allowance that is being made for them due to the unfortunate position. Whilst they will see it as appropriate to accommodate people, this is not because they accept that the workplace is a disabling environment that adds to the oppression of disabled people, and hence accommodating disabled people is setting right this wrong. Rather they consider that disabled people are the victim of brute bad luck, and it is morally right to show tolerance and willing in accommodating them, but there will be limits beyond which they will see it as unreasonable. Whilst there is sympathy for disabled people, it is tempered and does not reach the level of outrage at their position. They are not exceptional in this;

'... the policies of social inclusion have not been a response to popular demand. There have been no mass demonstrations of non-disabled people demanding that disabled people have access to sports centres, cinemas, cafés or supermarkets.' (Furedi, 2004, cited in Clement, 2006)

People's attitudes to disability are not straightforward, nor necessarily benign. And in many ways, it is on this point that the incompleteness of the social model of disability seems apparent. Whilst the social model proved a powerful force in turning round people's perceptions of disability and forcing a reappraisal of how to approach impairment, it does leave unanswered the question of why a society that accepts that people should get differential returns based on their skills, abilities and efforts, should then provide additional support to some people, unless it is on a moral basis that it is a

'good' thing to do. The argument that what disabled people experience is akin to oppression is difficult to refute, and there is ample evidence that society can be designed differently to make it more accessible to disabled people. But work remains central to the concept of citizenship, and people generally adhere to there being a link between value of a job and its reward, even if that reward can be greatly distorted for some roles. They accept readily the competition for work, the lack of guarantee that individuals will be provided work and the need for the best person to get the job. Hence their suspicion over anything that seems to tilt the balance in favour of people that is not reasonably linked to their ability and capacity to do the job better than the next person. It is at this point that the social model seems to weaken: much has been made about the need to change the nature of work, but often this has been around grand but vague re-conceptualisations of the work, or breaking the link between work and income. In simple terms, to provide disabled people with support at work, especially extensive support, is a form of welfare, however uncomfortably this fits with the social model.

This is not to place fault with disabled people, but nor can it be seen to be the fault of work. In many ways it reflects Shakespeare's notion of disability as a predicament (Shakespeare, 2006). If work is to be a competitive process, then for at least a proportion of disabled people some degree of support or accommodation is needed that other people do not require. People will accept this as long as it fits with their rationality that is it is a reasonable thing to do, because they see disabled people as being dealt a difficult hand in life's lottery. To ignore this it to create a source of deception that is rooted in the incompleteness of the social model of disability. A fully developed theory of disability may be able to challenge the basic rationality that people operate by, and in doing so allow the conceptualisation of a different societal order in which impairment is indeed wholly separated from disability. But until this is achieved, any drive to shift the rationality under which the system of disability and employment operates will need to take into account the fundamental concept of disability which people generally embrace.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> See Masala and Petretto (2008) for a review of the development of conceptual models of disability in the 20th century).

This research has explored the disconnect between people's general willingness to have more disabled people within the workplace, and their specific concerns and ideas that act as barriers to this happening. It also highlights that people conceptualise disabled people differently to disabled workers, which links to issues of fairness and competitiveness that come into play when someone enters the contractual employment relationship. Whilst disabled people may still be seen sympathetically, they are viewed differently. The notion that they should be treated significantly differently, thus challenging their ideas around what constitutes fair and reasonable treatment, is unsettling to managers and staff. Their desire is to minimise differences between disabled and non-disabled workers. Perceptions of disabled workers may not be reasonable or fair in themselves, but it is argued that to see this simply as a matter of discrimination and risk-averse attitudes is to not recognise the complexity of people's thinking. The concerns that people have feed into defining what will be rational decision making for the organisation. There may be a disconnect between what people generally want for disabled people and how they then tend to think disabled workers should be treated, but this study has shed some insights into where this disconnect is rooted.

## **How the research aims and objectives have been met**

This research sought to meet a number of objectives. The first objective was to develop a specific analytical framework around disability and employment. This was achieved using the work of Ulrich on Critical Systems Heuristics as a basis for developing the framework. Evidence from the literature review was then utilised to develop a specific framework around different forms of rationality, echoing the approach of Lockett. The second objective was to examine the ideas and concepts managers and workers hold about both disability and disabled workers within the workplace, through undertaking a case study at a large commercial firm. This was achieved firstly by successfully organising and carrying out a case study, interviewing a range of staff at a large commercial bakery. The case study provided rich data that was analysed in detail, providing significant insight into how people generally conceptualise

disability, and how this impacts on how they think about disabled people within the workplace.

The third objective was to utilise the analytical framework as part of the analysis of the data from the case study. This has been achieved, and the framework appears robust and useful, providing an approach to understanding the rationality of the sample group that has helped build understanding of the sample group. In particular it has been useful in evaluating the 'as-is' and 'ought-to-be' rationalities of the staff groups, and the barriers inherent to moving between them. This is significant as it helps inform how future policy could be developed. This then links to the last objective, which was to use the insights gained from the analysis to put forward ideas that could be useful in the further development of policy and practice around disability and employment. This has been achieved, as a number of ideas have been explored around policy development which are grounded in the findings from the research.

In meeting these specific objectives the overall aim of the research has been met, in that it has addressed a particular gap in knowledge around disability and employment, relating to how people conceptualise disability and how this in turn impacts on how they conceptualise disabled workers. It has been argued from the research findings that people conceptualise disabled people and disabled workers differently, a difference underpinned by their thinking around competition and fairness. It has also been suggested that the organisational and managerial approach to what is reasonable in regard to disabled workers is driven by what is held as reasonable by staff across the organisation, which in turn links back to their conceptualisation of disability and employment. This research offers an insight that goes beyond extrapolating ideas about employment from existing models of disability idea, as the insight is drawn from the thinking and ideas of a key stakeholder group. Moreover the insight has been developed using an analytical framework established from the range of literature available, and focused on accommodating and understanding the conflicting rationalities that are apparent in this area of research.

## **Original contributions to knowledge**

In terms of what this research has offered in terms of original contributions to knowledge, there are three areas that present themselves. In terms of an empirical contribution, the case study offers a valuable insight into the thinking of staff working in a real world situation, adding to the existing body of knowledge. It offers a distinctive perspective, taking a sample from board to shop floor, examining in detail their ideas and thinking around disability and employment. Whilst it is a single case study, it offers a rich insight into how staff and managers conceptualise disability, and has drawn out how different drivers' impact on their thinking, contributing to a general sense of ambiguity over the overall issue. It also has suggested that a significant issue is the different way in which the disabled worker is conceptualised to the disabled person, which is linked to how people conceptualise competitiveness and fairness within the workplace. It has also suggested that the approach to disabled workers within an organization will be driven ideas about what is reasonable, which in turn will be defined by what staff perceive as reasonable. This is of significance, as it suggests that the way in which staff conceptualise disability and disabled workers will be a driver in organisational responses to disability. The overall value of these insights is that they add to the understanding of the conceptual processes that underpin the responses of a key stakeholder group to disabled people within the workplace.

In terms of a conceptual contribution, the framework used to analyse the data is an original idea. Clearly it is derived from the work of Ulrich, and builds upon the approach of Lockett, but it offers an approach for understanding disability and employment that has not been used before. Derived on a theoretical basis, it proved a useful method of analysing the rich data set from the interviews, and for focusing on the rationality of the social actors within the system and the potential for change. The framework could be used for analysing similar situations, and has the potential to be developed further for application in a wider range of situations.

In terms of a policy contribution, it has offered ideas for developing policy around employment and disability based on the outcomes of the research that could be useful

to those concerned in this arena. It has also pointed to the need to mature the debate of disability and employment, and seek a clearer and more widely accepted rationale for accommodating disabled people in the workplace. This is of significance as it suggests that current policy approaches to disability and employment are weakened by the absence of a rationale acceptable to all stakeholders.

## **Areas for further research**

A number of areas for further research could be pursued on this basis of this case study. Further case studies could be undertaken to explore the generalisability of the findings from this research. This could include both within commercial organisations with similar characteristics to Breadco, and also others with markedly different characteristics. In doing so the issue of how differing organisational cultures may impact on the way in which disability and employment is conceptualised could be explored. Such research could also utilise the rationality framework as a means of examining staff and managers thinking over disability and employment. As well as looking to validate the framework more fully, extending the range of use of the framework could be explored. The framework was developed specifically around commercial sector organisations: an obvious development could be to apply it to public sector organisations. Moreover, the approach mapped out in chapter four could be utilised for developing frameworks linked to other areas of concern around disability, or other areas of social disadvantage.

The research has examined the conceptualisation of disability and employment for one set of stakeholders. Further research could be undertaken with other key stakeholder groups. Two groups seem to offer particular interest. The first is government policy makers and strategists around disability and employment. The second could be organisations that are seen as influential around policy, such as employer organisations, trade bodies, think tanks, trade unions and similar organisations. The significance of these two groups is that they are influential in shaping policy that in turn impacts on how organisations then approach disability and employment. Research could be undertaken to identify how they conceptualise disability, and how



this correlates with the staff and managers from within this study. It could also consider how their concepts of disability and employment underpin their policy development around disability and employment, including how it addresses the day-to-day concerns of managers and staff within the workplace.

## **Limitations to the research**

There are limitations to this research, not least that it is a single case study, and cannot simply be assumed to be characteristic of all employers. However, it has given a detailed insight into how people conceptualise disability in relation to their experiences and expectations of work, and as an organisation Breadco is one that sees itself as a fair employer concerned with its workforce. It is not unreasonable to assume that the broad perspectives expressed by the staff groups would be reflective of wider thinking, and while there may be other firms that have a much more positive approach to disability, it is also likely that far more firms have less positive thinking in this field. The purpose of this research was not to seek out an example of excellent practice, or to study specific schemes for employing disabled people, but rather to take a 'typical' group of staff and look at their perspectives and viewpoints. This was done in order to consider how their thinking may inform future approaches to disability within the workplace, especially workplaces that are driven by the commercial imperative.

## **Final conclusions**

In conclusion, this piece of work, whilst it has focused on understanding the ideas and thinking of people who are not disabled, is in the end about disability. The history of disabled people in this country is not a comfortable one, and there is much in this history that by modern standards is shameful and unacceptable. The struggle of disabled people to take control of their lives and demand a place in society is indeed a journey of emancipation, and any research should be mindful of the impact that it has on that continuing struggle. As has been pointed out

'An emancipatory project is not one that reflects attempts to 'enable' people to subject themselves to the needs of the economy, but puts attempts to make the economy serve the needs of the people at its heart. (Connor, 2010:51)

There are many voices, and many debates around disability, what it means and how society should respond, and it is hoped that this piece of work will be seen as a positive, albeit small, contribution to this on-going narrative.



## Appendix 2 : Interview structure

Question	Rationale
<p>How would you define someone as disabled ?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>What is different about them in your view?</i></li> </ul>	Identifying personal perceptions/knowledge of disability and impairment
<p>What kind of problems do they (disabled people) face in life ?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Where do you think these problems come from</i></li> <li>- <i>If stigma is mentioned, follow up with exploration of where they think stigma comes from</i></li> </ul>	Identifying their perceptions of tragedy/social models of disability
<p>What in general could/should be done about those problems ?</p>	Identifying their perceptions of tragedy/social models of disability, placing the locus of accountability for disability
<p>What kind of problems do they face in getting a job ?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>How does this differ to someone who is not disabled?</i></li> </ul>	Locating their perceptions of the impact of impairment and disability around employability
<p>What approach should businesses have towards employing disabled people ?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Do you think there should be more disabled people in work (closed question followed by) why?</i></li> <li>- <i>What do you think is the best way to get more disabled people into work</i></li> <li>- <i>should businesses should have a specific responsibility around employing disabled people ?</i></li> <li>- <i>why should(not) it have such a responsibility ?</i></li> <li>- <i>what is your view of equality legislation in regards to disability – what does it mean to you ? do you think it is necessary/effective (closed question, followed by) why is that ?</i></li> </ul>	Exploring attitudes to the reality of employing disabled people in business linked to perceptions of responsibility.
<p>Should disabled people have any specific support around doing their job ? (closed question, answer followed by) why is that ?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>who could/should fund that support ?</i></li> <li>- <i>how much support would be reasonable ?</i></li> </ul>	Exploring attitudes to the principles of additional support to enable disabled people to participate in the work place. Locating the role of the company and the state in welfare support.
<p>Do you think disabled people should have a right to a job if they want to work ? (closed question, answer followed by) why is that ?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>should they have a right not to work if they do not want to ?</i></li> <li>-</li> </ul>	Exploring personal concepts of rights relating to employing, linked to concepts of welfare support

<p>What do think the impact of having more disabled people in work would have on business</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>would it have an impact on competitiveness</i></li> <li>- <i>if so, how should businesses respond</i></li> <li>- <i>what issues would managers face in having more disabled staff in work</i></li> <li>- <i>how would workers respond to more disabled people in work : what could we expect of them.</i></li> <li>- <i>How would customers respond to more disabled people</i></li> <li>- <i>Should disabled people have a right to more flexible arrangements, such as flexible working, changes to job roles etc</i></li> </ul>	<p>Exploring perceptions of the impact of disabled people on the work environment, and the balance between individual interests and business imperatives.</p>
<p>Should businesses adjust how work is carried out to support disabled people in carrying out a job ? <b>(closed question, answer followed by)</b> why is that ?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>how much change would seem reasonable to you</i></li> <li>- <i>how should businesses respond did not seem as productive as other people/were absent more than other people</i></li> </ul>	<p>Exploring concepts of reasonableness in relation to workplace accommodations</p>
<p>Where do you think rights comes from ?</p>	<p>Exploring people's understanding and conceptualisation of rights in general</p>
<p>Where do you think morals come from ?</p>	<p>Contrasting people's understanding and conceptualisation of morals and rights</p>
<p>What change in the approach to increasing the number of disabled people in the work place would you most like to see ?</p>	<p>Identifying the priorities people have for improvement, based on the interview.</p>

### Appendix 3 : Codings

Area 1	Area 2	Area 3
disability	model	life
one change	disability	change
rights	customer	response
morals	sickness	task allocation
management	remuneration	workrate
DDA	funding	productivity
rights	teamwork	new person
support	funding	consultation
company	need for	support
misc	awareness	stigma
	responsibility	work
	approach	getting work
	experience	misc
	family	
	value	
	problems	
	amount	
	not work	
	work	
	misc	

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